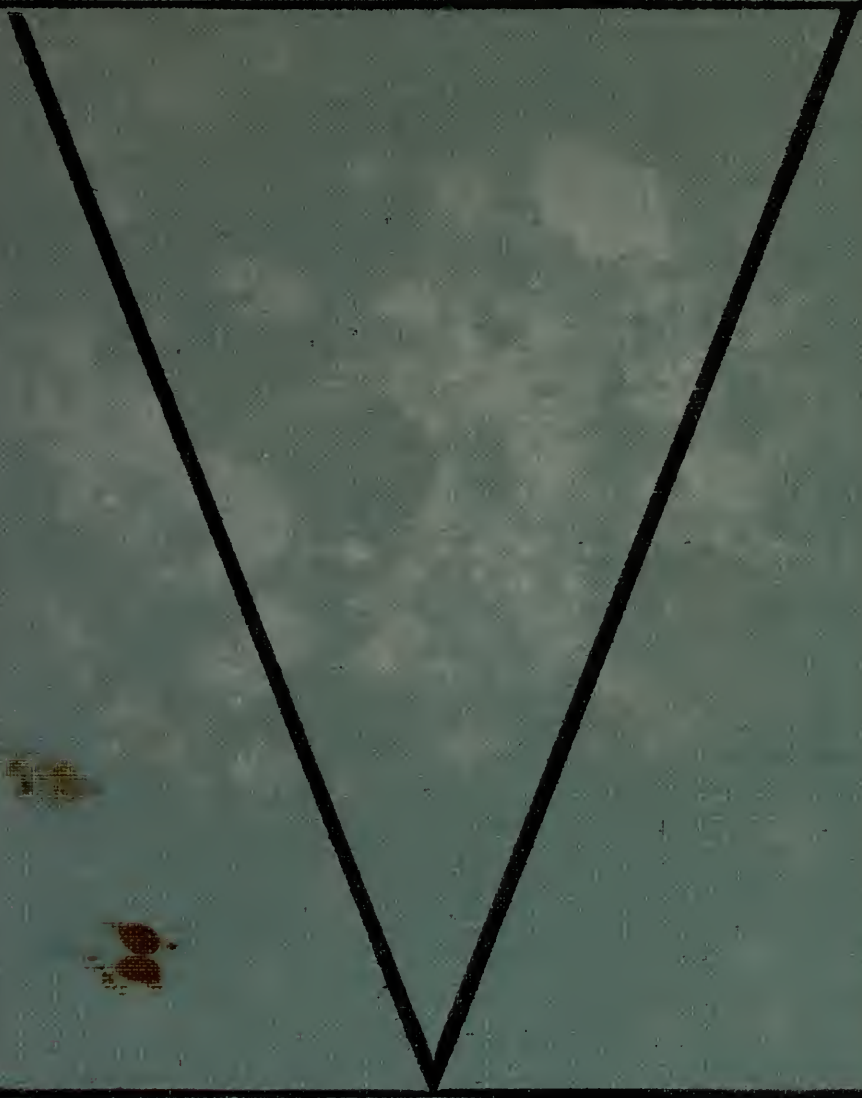
PILGRIM TO THE ABYSS



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PILGRIM TO THE ABYSS

AMOR VACUI

BY AXEL EGGEBRECHT

Translated from the German by
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CHAPTER I

SOME three months after the battle of Sadowa, in the early days of October, the Princess Anna Kyrillovna made an astounding, a *dégoûtant,* a scarcely credible discovery. While guests were at her house for tea, she sent for the family physician and told him to make a hasty, so to speak, cursory examination; as though she could somehow thus ensure that his verdict would be of little consequence. A buzz of animated women's voices penetrated to the dressing-room, where the consultation took place. And, indeed, a very few moments sufficed to satisfy the old doctor. As he raised his wrinkled face and gold-rimmed spectacles from his patient's body, he met a gaze so full of impatient, almost terrified expectancy that with a somewhat clumsy effort at delicacy he couched his conclusions in the form of a most respectful offer of congratulations.

He was immediately struck by the Princess's morose and rebellious expression. When after a drawn-out pause, he prepared to take leave, she laid a detaining hand on him, and inquired with surprising vehemence the exact date of the expected birth. He told her June of the following year. She received this information with an unconcealed sigh of

relief. Then the old physician, to his surprise, found himself dismissed almost without ceremony.

Anna Kyrillovna was accustomed to see her way very clearly before her in all that she did, and even determined in advance with all possible precision the rise and course of her own emotions. At this crisis, therefore, she did not hesitate to probe her feelings fearlessly. She began at once to consider the consequences, both immediate and more remote, which this new state of affairs would have for her.

The thought of her waiting guests was an annoyance; and despatching a servant to make her excuses, she gave herself up to meditation.

In March of the following year a World Exhibition was to be opened in Paris. Peoples and sovereigns alike had recently acquired a taste for the crowded magnificence of these displays; and for the second time the French Emperor had issued invitations to an industrial prize-fight and bean-feast of this kind. It was by now an open secret that this ruler with the soul of a *petit Bourgeois* was far from easy on his throne. After some meaningless, if victorious, wars he was relying on successful commercial undertakings rather than on "the grace of God" to consolidate his position. In fact, the unhappy monarch hoped to refurbish the glories of his crown with the borrowed wealth and insignia of a prosperous *bourgeoisie*.

The Czar of Russia, on the other hand, watched with condescending amazement the rulers of western Europe zealously prostrating themselves before new gods. As the semi-oriental representative of a primitive and sacred autocracy he set aside politely, if a little disdainfully, the suggestion that he should hallow the inauguration of these industrial bacchanals with his exalted presence. He consented, however, to be represented by a delegation from the ranks of his grand-dukes, high nobility, and general staff. By a decree of August 28th Prince Boris was nominated head of the delegation. This nomination was, by general consent, both wise and fortunate. Among the 'Excellencies,' indeed, it was regarded as a good-humored little joke on His Majesty's part, since the Prince was, by descent as it were, predestined intermediary between the Holy Czardom and the French *parvenu*.

For the Prince's grandfather was that one of the Corsican's near relations who had stood closer, perhaps, than any other to the secret heart of the great Emperor, notwithstanding that their differences of temperament had expressed themselves unequivocally on numerous occasions. Napoleon valued this man for the honest strength of a large and noble heart, which he was often able to utilize to his own advantage. When the crash came the viceroy scorned to follow the example of other of the captured Emperor's trusted followers and beg for the victors' favors. None the less, married to a German prin-

cess, he was confirmed in his rank as a sovereign prince and in the possession of considerable wealth. In the third decade of the century he married his only son to a princess of the court of St. Petersburg. This prince died early, and Boris was the elder of his two sons.

In Boris, there still lay dormant the family energy, which fifty years earlier had worked itself out on all the plains and passes of a continent. There was not a trace in his nature of the tempestuous vigor, the tense restless spirit of the viceroy of Italy. More easily discernible in him was the softness of temperament which centuries of secure and easy-going existence as planters in the luxuriant West Indies had bred in his remoter ancestors. Holding no public position, he lived on his revenues in Gatchina and Tzarskoye Selo. He might, it is true, claim to be an amateur of the sciences. More than one expedition to sail around the world had been undertaken under his patronage. He attended regularly the sittings of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences, where he was known principally for his consistent silence. By his thirtieth year he had become a confirmed invalid.

In the year that the serfs were freed he married the only daughter of a Boyar family, which had been kin from time immemorial to all the dominant houses of Russia. In Anna Kyrillovna interested visitors at the court of St. Petersburg found a remarkable specimen of the impenetrable oriental, of the unexplainable Russian woman, of which the western mind has

cherished so many false illusions since the eventful days of feminine rule in the eighteenth century. In her slender beauty, obscurely menacing, the European could discern a trace of her remotest ancestors —Tartar chieftains of the line of Jenghiz Khan. From her earliest youth she had given herself heart and soul to the ever-shifting intrigues of St. Petersburg, most incalculable of courts. She was no stranger to the brutality, the violence, the sudden yawning abysses lying hidden behind the smooth exteriors and intricate ceremonial of the richest palace in the world.

She had married Boris, a prince of an almost imperial house, without giving a single thought, first or last, to the differences of their temperaments. In this woman, educated by French governesses and German professors, limitless appetite for splendor and admiration, insatiable ambition to see all beneath her heel, survived—barbaric, absolute! The resolute tread, the slightly inclined carriage of the head, the shoulders braced, yet suddenly drooping, might display to the fascinated observer the bewildering charm of unbridled temperament; but one look into the inexorable, calculating eyes betrayed that this woman had travelled far into the icy deserts of egotism.

In her Asiatic blood abhorrence for the child of a weakling, of an inherently slack and ineffective man, was stronger than the natural pride of motherhood.

The only conflict between these two radically different natures had occurred soon after the marriage. The Prince happened to enter his wife's bedroom just as she was chastising an old maid-servant, a former serf, for spilling tea on a feather coverlet, by striking the woman, slowly and with emphasis, with a heavy, plaited belt, right and left across the face. Boris, after dismissing the old woman, had taken the girdle from the astonished Princess, and after a long penetrating look, charged with melancholy, had begged her never to wear it again. Then he had gone away. Even now, years afterwards, Anna Kyrillovna felt the blood rush to her head when she remembered her stupid, helpless paralysis in that foolish moment. She could have understood anything else: violence, rage, even actual brutality; but this senseless softness, to which she had none the less succumbed, she could never forget or forgive either her husband or herself.

As time went on and it became more and more obvious that her husband's position at court was not, and never would be, brilliant or distinguished, she soon became totally indifferent to him. The outward form of the marriage remained; but Anna Kyrillovna sought to satisfy her hungry ambition by taking an increasing part in the official undertakings of the Imperial ladies, and by maintaining an excessively large and costly household.

When her husband, whom the world for some time past had regarded as a nonentity, was solemnly

appointed to represent the Czar, at the Paris Exhibition, Anna Kyrillovna's astonishment was immense, her delight almost childish. Tailors, jewellers, shoemakers and seamstresses were set speedily to work. The Princess's sudden and aggressive satisfaction actually expressed itself in the guise of a deeper feeling for the Prince, who understood human nature too little to perceive its real basis. Throughout that August the Princess was not unlike an excited bride; indeed, the prospect of the brilliant days before her in Paris made her gay as a school-girl with leave to go to her first ball.

She had reason enough, therefore, for her horror at the revelation made by the doctor. Reckoning up her chances, she did her best to persuade herself that she would be able to travel in the spring, and clung in spite of reason to what she knew to be a forlorn hope.

That evening, when the Prince entered her room, she overwhelmed him with embraces, drew him to a chair, climbed upon his knee and whispered the surprising news in his ear. When he would have sprung to his feet in his delight she still held him fast; yet all the time she had but one thought in her mind—how desperately unlikely her longed-for journey had become.

During the months that followed the Prince exhausted himself in loving attentions. His devotion persisted, unwearied by her increasing estrangement. Gradually, however, her irritability and sudden out-

bursts of temper became intolerable. At last, in March, in the sixth month of her pregnancy, Boris told her that the opening of the Exhibition had been provisionally postponed owing to the sad events in Mexico and that he would very likely be able to remain with her till after the birth of the child. This news produced no perceptible effect on the Princess at the time, yet afterwards she grew calm again and very quiet. A curious expression of weary repugnance deepened over her face day by day like a cloud. It was no longer possible to talk to her.

At the end of May Boris set out on his journey, having taken a long silent farewell of his wife. He was not, however, especially anxious as to her condition, though he promised to return as soon as possible; for he thought he read in her sidelong, speechless gaze a prayer that he would do so. He went, and Anna Kyrillovna laughed, very quietly, at his retreating back; she was thinking what his face would be like when he came home to find a stillborn child. Beyond the door his footsteps died away. With concentrated passion she wished destruction to the life within her womb.

On the fifth of June, however, she was delivered quickly and almost painlessly. The doctors were amazed at the mother's indifference and perfect composure. She received the news that the child was a girl with a little smile which two young assistant physicians afterwards described as "almost ironical,"

and the high-bosomed wet-nurse from Ryazan had actually to ask the Princess if she would not like to see the child.

The happy father's telegrams remained unanswered. He thought some bad news was being kept from him and hurried home, having brought his Paris mission to a close without waiting for leave of absence. The Princess received him almost without movement or speech. For days he tormented himself, refusing to credit this indifference.

Even at the christening, some weeks later, Anna Kyrillovna hardly raised her head until the Czar stepped forward and kissed his godchild. The priest uttered the names "Olga," "Alexandra" and many another over the infant, while Boris vainly endeavored to intercept his wife's glances and the child's mother was brooding on the fact that her dresses had had to be widened by more than a *vershok*.

Built upon wood piles in the treacherous marshlands stands the northern capital. Its streets, planned as if under the eye of a drill-sergeant, run straight as arrows, crossing each other at rectangles. The imagination of its architects, under the constraint of the royal command, seems to have been obsessed by the straight line. The imposing façades of innumerable palaces, the less pretentious fronts of burghers' houses, are alike in their emphatic simplicity. Above the vast field of buildings of equal

height towers here and there the oppressive magnificence of the cathedral.

Not far from the city is the sea—at times its tang can be felt in the wind—not far, yet invisible, hidden, where the river runs to meet it, by the arsenal buildings and by garden-clad islands where splendid noblemen's villas and expensive restaurants rise side by side amidst the verdure. At nightfall fogs brewed in the Gulf of Finland come creeping up from the river's mouth. The mighty stream is spanned by bridges and its precipitous wharfs dwarf even the great red palace of the Czars.

Behind the Winter Palace, at the entrance to a narrow street, stand the giant, grey, granite figures of the Hermitage. Here, in a row, stood the palaces of members of the Imperial family and of the highest nobility. An age still secure and arrogant enough to glory openly in its hastily accumulated and immense stores of wealth, had named this street the Millionnaya. The sixth house on the left side had been built by Catherine the Great for one of her favorites. In this massive, three-storied, capacious building Olga Borisovna was born.

The sandstone and marble walls rose through a gamut of subdued yet rich color. Above the rust-brown basement they became dark rose, above that, orange, the scale rising to a high note of yellow in the last story against the sky, as though in the light of an ever-brightening sunrise. The big, slightly bowed windows mirrored the passing equipages, the glitter-

ing uniforms of officers and the steely breadth of the Neva.

An army of serf artisans, architects and builders had worked for seven years on the gates and stairways, halls and corridors, boudoirs, guest-chambers and reception rooms, kitchens, courtyards and stables. Walls and floors were covered in brocades, tapestries and carpets; the fittings of doors, lattices and furniture were of every known precious metal. Countless servants, on hand at every turn and corner, dusted and swept, fetched and carried, washed and cooked, keeping the seventy rooms in a high state of cleanliness and polish.

There was no place for a garden near the house. The garden lay fifty minutes' carriage-drive away, south-west of the town, in Ligovo, near the Imperial summer palaces. Strong, spiked iron palings, gilt at the top, stood guard there over many an acre. Tall gates of wrought-iron work barred every approach. Within these barriers long drives ran beneath evenly spaced avenues of trees, past English lawns and lush-banked ornamental waters up to the little palace, which was built low and wide and contained a mere thirty-five rooms. For many months together a second corps of lackeys, cooks, waiting-women and gardeners had the palace to themselves. Should, however, the great folks suddenly appear for a few days, or even for a few hours, there stood the long obsequious ranks, with bowed backs breathing in the dust of the passing carriage wheels.

A grinding, crunching noise. Green expanses half seen through a cloud of dust. A long row of bowed backs.

These were the small Princess Olga's earliest, dim recollections. One day she would inherit from her father twenty such castles and estates, scattered over as many different provinces. The Prince himself had not seen them all; some he knew only through his bailiffs' reports and increasing banking accounts. Moreover, he seldom now left the warm coasts of the south. Since his daughter's second birthday the state of his health had been very grave and month by month his physicians awaited the end.

Anna Kyrillovna did not wait. She cared as little whether her husband lived or died as she did for the existence of her daughter. Everyone of rank and position in St. Petersburg thronged to her salons and her house had rapidly become one of those secret battle-grounds where the real moves of the political game in the great capital were played out. Never for an instant did the Princess commit herself personally to any adventure or project, but while all the world crowded to her doors, while she saw their deference, while she became more and more obviously the pivot upon which her world revolved, she found peace in the consciousness of power. From moment to moment she could precipitate or allay some crisis at her pleasure; in the confident exercise of this despotism her nature acquired new radiance, new balance.

Meanwhile, in four small rooms in an out-of-the-way wing of the great house, little Olga grew to conscious existence. From the care of nurses she passed to that of governesses, who sat about the child by threes and fours, ate and slept, and, for very despair of the horrible tedium, exchanged banter and innuendoes with the oafish lackeys. These women were never permitted to leave the house. Naturally enough they wreaked their stifled exasperation on the child. Deep respect for the little Princess had, of course, been enjoined on them. Still in the normal course of conscientious instruction they found opportunities in plenty for small displays of malice, the more so since the child's mother frequently did not visit her for days together, and in any case made no secret of her indifference. Only the jealousies existing among the governesses and waiting-women themselves saved Olga from sheer, naked cruelty. From time to time in the dusk of a late afternoon there came relations, aunts, great-uncles or other embarrassing grown-ups, who popped sweets into Olga's mouth and talked in strange caressing phrases which she did not understand. She soon got the name of being a shy child whom it was not particularly amusing to visit. The poor little creature lived in complete isolation; with none to call forth her first conscious emotions these could only come from within.

How solemn, how circumscribed it was in those small stately apartments! How formal the bedstead, the plates and dishes, the brocaded coverings of the uncomfortable chairs! Clothes were an important and highly ceremonious matter. What an exciting game to wrap arms and legs in them—to feel the gentle pressure change every moment! Pleats must be very carefully arranged and one must be careful not to crumple them. White ruchings are tiresome, but sometimes increase quite thrillingly the discomforts of sitting and walking. Flowers exist to be fingered. If you break them quite slowly, a lot of juice comes out of their stalks. Some have a smell of morning, of old velvet hangings, of clean pillows. There is a stronger odor which means that Mademoiselle is bending over one to put something to rights.

At a somewhat later period Anna Kyrillovna discovered that it might, perhaps, sometimes be amusing to parade a daughter. She watched Olga as if she were some curious little animal and noticed, not without surprise, that the creature showed a sort of dumb, inexplicable will of its own. It was not, after all, worth while to present this sullen, lumpish child to her guests.

The régime of strict isolation was maintained as ruthlessly as if it had been a deliberate psychological experiment. In her first ten years Olga never saw a companion of her own age. Meanwhile lessons

multiplied. Her teachers' respectful reports of remarkable progress did not successfully conceal their chagrin at her too obvious lack of talent. Anna Kyrillovna herself made scarcely an attempt to mould her daughter's unformed character. Perhaps if her attention had been caught by some fit of childish naughtiness or defiance, a bond, however slight, might have been created between mother and child, but the little girl's imperturbable equanimity, the impossibility of even making her cry, inevitably reminded the Princess of her dead husband's maddening docility.

She watched the small caged life with mingled curiosity and disgust. How could such a creature breathe, play, sleep and eat? A silly little thing that never laughed, never cried—could it ever be taught to live, to desire, to be proud? Surely no drop of her blood flowed in those veins! Anna Kyrillovna thought herself very clever to despise her own child.

Tutors and servants were urged more and more stringently to zeal and devotion, while the days crept by in crushing monotony.

It was not till long after this that Olga realized that she had never known her father. Those about her were forbidden to mention his name in her presence. Furthermore, all great and simple emotions and concepts were unrevealed to this child; they were passed over in silence. Everything in her surroundings was unreal, almost ghostly for very vacuity,—a

hushed waiting for life to begin, so that later Olga had very few memories of those early years. A bird at the window-pane—ice-floes on the Neva—the fall of a picture from the wall—and, then, a series of little set phrases, the formulæ of countless meal-times, toilets and lessons:—

Ayez la bonté, vôtre Altesse—No, to-day it's only sixty degrees—Napoleon conquered Europe—No colors, Your Highness, colors are ungenteel—Piotr, remove Her Highness's shoes!

And you must hold your hand *thus,* and *this* is the way to sit at table! It was all indescribably wearisome—to be continually the centre of everyone's thoughts and conversation. Yet Olga gradually grew accustomed to it. Like her governesses she minced and learned to be stiff and ridiculous. The few faces she saw about her changed far too often for her to venture upon friendship with any of them. Moreover, since she was docile and easily led in minor matters, no one troubled much about the state of her deeper affections.

Sheer boredom drove her at last to use the little authority she possessed in these three or four rooms and indulge secretly, yet unashamedly, the lust for power. No child is as naïve as its elders' simplicity would like to suppose. Its consciousness, reflective and unprejudiced, perceives the world quite clearly until little by little the child too is drawn into the whirl and perplexity of adult life. It is therefore not surprising that this hedged-in little creature

should have become very acutely aware of the distance separating her from her anxious women attendants. If a strand of hair came loose a maid flew at once to her side. If a speck, a veriest trifle of dust settled upon her dress, some one of her slaves immediately seized the occasion to humiliate another with exclamations and reproofs. How easy it was to terrify the tame Fräuleins by a cry or a sudden movement! Gradually the child formed the pleasing habit of tormenting them, and this habit of playful cruelty gained on her the more that it was by such an act that she first won her mother's notice and an almost kindly glance. Anna Kyrillovna, indeed, genuinely respected these first overt acts of deliberate malice on her daughter's part, and she did not fail to let the child feel it.

All this, however, brought Olga to no clearer understanding of her own being. She had no means of taking her own measure. For her there was neither stakes nor victory; indeed no conflict at all with hard reality. She moved securely, though quite uncomprehendingly, through a padded and cushioned world. What she did or thought did not matter; right or wrong, good or bad, it was of no consequence for it had no consequences. It was all so terribly simple. That the simplicity was nothing but a suffocating lie Olga could not as yet realize.

Visits from her mother. Visits from her relations. Twice, no, three times, the Czar himself came to her nursery. And punctually year after year the servants

carried in bulky parcels containing magnificent presents from her god-parents, which meant she had to labor through letters of thanks.

In summer they went to one or another of the family estates inland. The carriage, having been thoroughly disinfected for the occasion, smelled horribly inside. They drove about the countryside in an old-fashioned, bulging coach, saw the cows and meadows and yellow harvest-fields stretching away to the horizon, and then came back to St. Petersburg, to the obsequious backs and confined rooms, to the same anxious, scared, bored women's faces—year after year, for three years, five years, ten years. Olga was eleven years old and nothing had happened to awaken her. She grew rapidly. Her eyes, grey eyes, hard, unchildlike and very still, knew no curiosity. The nostrils of her delicate narrow nose were so widely curved as to suggest fear. Her mouth was still quite unformed. Her slender neck, her lax limbs, her whole excessively thin little frame moved slowly and circumspectly. Her puckered, yellowish hands fumbled with her dolls rather than played with them, fingered flowers, groped hesitatingly in the pages of her lesson-books. And on the nape of her neck, on her arms, in the hollows of her knees her skin had the soft glow and something of the aroma of southern fruits.

CHAPTER II

THE FRONTIERS of Asiatic Russia had been extended southwards by many hundred versts. General Kubileff had fought three winter campaigns and now the Turcoman tribes were urgently suing for peace. Even in advance of the victorious commander himself, the gaily apparelled, jingling emissaries of the Khans had reached St. Petersburg and were to be stared at in the streets and hotels and in the anterooms of palaces. After their submission, so ran the government plan, these petty chieftains were to be received as fully-privileged members of the high nobility. Accordingly one of these yellow-faced gentlemen from the district of Merv appeared one day in Anna Kyrillovna's salon, and the Princess spoke to him, smiling graciously, of some possible distant relationship between them, lost inextricably, no doubt, in the mists of Asiatic centuries. Some Russian officers who accompanied the Khan had wonderful stories to tell of the conquered chieftain's magnificent feats of horsemanship, while he, bowing gracefully and smilingly disclaiming their praises, retaliated with a long account of the superhuman courage of the victorious Russian general. Indeed the young officers of the Kirghiz Cossacks who acted as inter-

preters found it by no means easy to render the Khan's enthusiastic narrative, especially the rolling periods, freely decorated with metaphor and quotations from Firdousi and Bakis. The collaboration resulted in a word portrait of the hitherto almost unknown general as a whimsical fellow, at once generous and ruthless, recklessly brave and with a fine head for liquor. During the next few days this description ran from mouth to mouth through all St. Petersburg, causing a furor for the new 'lion' even before his arrival.

When, therefore, Maxim Maximovitch appeared in person, the most influential salons competed for his visits. But polished Court society was soon disillusioned by the hero's frank, undisguised boorishness. No sooner had he handed in his official reports than he was dragged round from reception to reception, yet social enthusiasm soon waned for a hero who rarely spoke, ate enormously and made no secret of the fact that he preferred the delights of alcohol to conversation and the expectant curiosity of women. Moreover, he was too unromantic and unassuming to atone for his confessedly impossible manners. The ladies found the *grandezza* of the khans incomparably more attractive, and Kubileff's omission to share in the general idolization of the men he had conquered was considered particularly shabby. To snub them insolently, as he had done at accidental meetings, was pronounced plebeian and ungenerous, though, as a matter of fact, the Tartars

themselves seemed to feel his lack of courtesy far less acutely than it was felt by the disgusted elegants of St. Petersburg society.

Kubileff soon began to feel lost and oppressed in these assemblies. Before he had visited Anna Kyrillovna's house he had grown heartily sick of the whole business. He found it far pleasanter to go down to the islands with a few boon companions, there to drift from tavern to tavern till morning found him in a state of absolute and blissful intoxication in the arms of some girl.

Tales of incidents of this kind passed swiftly from mouth to mouth and did not increase the General's popularity. Anna Kyrillovna, however, had from the first felt an undefined sympathy for the conqueror of the Turcomans. She continued to inquire after him and eventually commissioned a couple of young guardsmen to catch him *à tout prix* and bring him to her.

At last, one afternoon, they conducted him to the Millionnaya. He was at once received by the Princess herself. She led him through the rooms, sat down with him in a corner apart, and treated him with the marked courtesy accorded to a highly honored guest. He was made to feel that he was specially valued and had been eagerly expected. Whether or not Anna Kyrillovna began the game through mere curiosity and love of change, she captivated the General forthwith through sheer excess of flattery. His new patroness liked him unre-

servedly from the first. Her influence over him soon became apparent. He trimmed his beard and bought a number of new uniforms, while under the Princess's watchful guidance he succeeded in getting through two or three balls with tolerable credit. Suddenly, and this time conclusively, he became the hero of the town. Everyone strove to show him good-will and the rough soldier, clumsy as a bear, found himself fondled, flattered and looked up to. His big square head and bushy beard might be seen towering above a throng of surrounding women who, while he talked of the steppes and river-gorges of Turkestan, studied the stubble fields at the nape of his neck and the varied landscape of his veined and sinewy throat.

But his patroness's projects went further. Anna Kyrillovna left him no peace. She changed his well-earned leave into an exhausting hunt for fresh commands, honors and offices. Inwardly groaning, the docile favorite spent painful hours at his protectress's mahogany writing-table composing memorials and petitions. She saw to it that these were speedily answered. Afterwards there were letters of thanks to the Czar, even personal reminiscences of campaigns. The result of these continuous and well-directed efforts was to make the long-suffering General a national idol. On appropriate occasions he now spoke a few significant words, and even made short speeches in which he had been carefully coached beforehand. All at once he found himself at the centre of political circles and the champion of the Pan-Slavic

movement. While he sighed beneath the Princess's tyranny his name began to figure in the European press, dreaded, abused, or idolized.

It is hard to determine what actually pleased the Princess in this boorish, helpless, docile fellow. Probably it was his occasional violent, unexpected and unrestrainable temperamental outbursts. He would one moment go the length in brutality and vulgarity, and in the next, assume his mildness and naïveté as though nothing had happened. Anna Kyrillovna respected these outbreaks of forces which likewise slumbered in herself. The two drew continually nearer together in a strange relationship of mutual inclination and mutual fear. Hardened bachelor that he was, Kubileff became accustomed to and grew to like this great house and the plenty and secure orderliness of the luxurious life provided there. It began to be whispered that the hero of the Turcoman campaigns had already become the Princess's lap-dog and would, perhaps, some day be something more.

Olga's history tutor was a timid young professor, who acted in this capacity for most of the blue-blooded, and *the* most blue-blooded, children in the city. He possessed caution and tact to an unusual degree, and therefore was well fitted for his work. In this instance, however, he had as regards the presentation of his subject sincere qualms of conscience. All the great events of the past must, of course, be

explained as the God-ordained services to humanity of a series of admirable monarchs. But his present pupil's twofold line of descent presented certain insuperable difficulties. Napoleon and the Czar Alexander; the Bravest of the Brave, Marshal Ney, Prince of Moscow and the loyal patriot, Rostoptschin, who set fire to Moscow; these were irreconcilables. In vain the worried tutor asked advice of experienced colleagues. At last he resolved to pass over the events of the Napoleonic era as rapidly and as sketchily as possible.

In this wise the little Princess, whose whole life was made up of soul-destroying routine and vacuity, was robbed from the first of even the knowledge of her significant ancestry. From her tutor's short, disjointed remarks concerning her great-grandfather, the viceroy of Italy, she retained the hazy notion that that country at the beginning of the century had been ruled openly under Russian influence. The tutor's task became still more difficult when he had to expound the recent past. Sebastopol had been conquered only twenty years ago. How could he bring his survey to a close with one grand tableau, illustrating the glorious results of Russian autocracy?

In this state of doubt Kubileff, the new national hero, came as a veritable godsend. Moreover, the tutor believed he might win the Princess's particular favor by suitable praise of her friend. Next to the Czar, little Father and all-wise deliverer of the peasants, he implanted in his small scholar's narrow

understanding an image of Kubileff at more than life size, that was the embodiment of all human virtue.

The General, for his part, liked the dainty, silent little girl uncommonly well. Olga gazed at him wide-eyed. So many tales had been told her of the great deeds done by that huge, hairy hand, and of the heroic decisions taken beneath that beetling brow. He patted the child's thin cheeks good-naturedly and took her gently on his knee. Anna Kyrillovna stood by smiling indulgently. This small new bond was just what she wished.

But unexpectedly Maxim Maximovitch showed a deeper interest in the child, and this interest expressed itself in the form of inconvenient suggestions and questions. He disliked all this retirement and isolation that looked very like imprisonment. He could not understand the mother's coldness. Anna Kyrillovna complained that the child lacked talent, spirit and independence. But—the General hastened to retort with unaccustomed fire—how could such qualities develop in rigorous seclusion, without open air and companionship? The Princess would have checked this presumptuous criticism at once were it not that most surprisingly the General stuck to his point, and moreover added that he considered a continuation of the present state of things unjustifiable and downright cruel. First and foremost, a proper lively little companion must be found at once, if the child were not to grow up half-witted

and miserable—any blind beggar could see as much!

Such a lecture was too much for the Princess's self-restraint. She led Kubileff from Olga's room, where the discussion had so far proceeded, and overwhelmed him with ironic comments on his lack of qualification for educating a princess, an *imperial* princess, let him remember! He let the storm pass in silence, but at the next opportunity he again brought the conversation around to Olga. On this theme his diffidence vanished; he stuck obstinately and tenaciously to his point. At last the Princess, bored with the whole subject, asked if he had any particular companion in mind. There would be no objection to an occasional afternoon's play with one or the other of the little grand-duchesses.

Kubileff laughed this suggestion aside. Olga's playmate must be someone fresh and unspoiled; not a child of rank, but an ordinary, normal child—a child, so to speak, of the Russian people. Naturally she would have to be chosen very carefully. Finally he mentioned as a possible companion for Olga the daughter of a former subaltern, now a humble court official. At first, Anna Kyrillovna rejected this presumptuous suggestion indignantly. None the less, she made secret inquiries. Henrietta, she discovered, was in her way as lonely a child as Olga. She had always been carefully kept from contact with the burghers' and townsfolks' children; and on the other hand, the royal and princely children of the court,

whose indescribable superiority had been continually eulogized by her parents, were far above her reach. All this didn't sound badly, so the Princess came to a decision.

Henrietta's presentation at the palace was a red-letter day in the history of the small official's family. After endless admonitions, and dressed up like a little sixteenth-century Infanta, Henrietta appeared before Anna Kyrillovna, who was pleased to find that the child answered her abrupt questions with deep humility and awe, yet without hesitation. Henrietta, it was clear, would fill her rôle very well.

Olga had still to be prepared. She could of course have no conception of the extent of the coming change in her life. Most unwisely the newcomer's social disparity had been in advance deeply impressed upon her. This qualification of a still unknown and uncomprehended gift made her uneasy and mistrustful.

Henrietta was brought into the room, made a deep curtsey, and waited to be greeted. Olga was speechless. For a little while the Princess paused, watching the children as they stood facing each other, awkward and shy. Then she grew bored, admonished the governess against leaving them for an instant by themselves, and left the room.

The governess believed that children ought to play. She was a woman with an absurd face like a duck in a picture-book. She brought out a ball from Olga's bursting toy cupboard. Henrietta, remem-

bering her parents' admonitions, always threw the ball within reach. Later on, when they played hare and hound, she ran nervously after Olga, not daring to lay hands on her. Then when she herself was 'hare,' she stood stock-still and let herself be caught. Presently the ever-watchful governess began to tell a long-winded, stupid story, which she considered very funny. Once or twice she laughed a little in the telling. Henrietta would have laughed too, but seeing Olga grave and silent she dared not. The governess, at her wit's end, maundered on and on; and the two children sat motionless and stared at one another. So passed the first afternoon.

So, indeed, passed many afternoons. The children were never left to themselves. Olga got used to her companion as she would have got used to a piece of furniture. Anna Kyrillovna was quite satisfied. She told Kubileff so, and he was glad of it. Actually the situation was unchanged. He had not time, however, to discover this; for just then he received orders for another year's service in Asia. When he went away his relations with the Princess had not progressed to a final clarification.

Four months later, in another campaign against the Turcomans, after three days of desert battle Kubileff won the victory which was forever to be associated with his name and which finally established Russian supremacy in Turkestan.

He chose some magnificent pieces from the spoils of battle for Anna Kyrillovna and despatched them

by special courier. He also sent a present for his little friend Olga—a very remarkable carpet, not large but many-patterned and in extraordinarily rich coloring. From the centre a row of yellow cords hung out. The servants who did the unpacking thought these cords were a blemish, and intended to cut them off; but for some reason they did not do so, and the carpet was hung up, just as it was, in Olga's nursery.

Olga wrote the General a letter of thanks. The Princess, glancing hastily through the short note, was arrested by one or two very warm, almost passionate, sentences in which the child expressed her joy at the thought of seeing her friend again. The mother's first impulse was to tear up the little letter, but instead she added a few words of her own, mockingly drawing the General's attention to the lively expectations aroused by his coming and saying that he must not long disappoint them. Besides, Olga had just passed her thirteenth birthday.

For a long time she stared at the words she had written. Then, coming to a sudden decision, she added, "She is not a child, and yet she is not grown up. A pretty little woman. Silly, perhaps—I do not feel I know her at all. When you come we must talk this over."

The official reception that awaited Kubileff on this second home-coming was prolonged and ceremonially exacting, but this time he played the great man's

part with assurance and without reluctance. All the highly placed and influential paid him unhesitating homage, so he, in his simplicity, soon began to acquire very large ideas of his own importance. Now for the first time he really felt a hero—the idol of the capital and the nation.

His former liking for Anna Kyrillovna had been genuine, but now, of a sudden, she began to bore him. Her attitude of superiority had not changed, and it spoilt for him the impression of greatness, which he now continually strove to create. The Princess, on her part, had idealized the rough soldier. She found him less polished than she had imagined; and as a matter of course, she wanted to take him in hand again. She established claims on him; she was as free as formerly with her unconsidered advice; she sought to excite him to partisanship, although he had meanwhile learnt to have interests of his own. She was clever, but still not wise enough to realize the change which a few months had wrought.

Maxim Maximovitch did not tell her to her face that he no longer needed a patroness. Instead he tried to re-establish their relationship on a cold and formal basis—an attempt which accorded oddly with his open and simple nature. The Princess noticed distinct signs of relapse to his earlier and coarser standard of manners; but he was now too famous for these to be very severely criticized, and he found her warnings the more irksome. In the

midst of these embarrassments he had failed so far to obtain sight of Olga, though the child herself had heard of his return from her governesses and asked more anxiously after him every day.

Anna Kyrillovna, doubtful as to the best course to pursue, had just reached the point of deciding to enlist her daughter's unconscious aid, when, at a small afternoon tea-party in her own house, she was regaled by a lady of the court with certain quite unequivocal details of an intrigue between Kubileff and some ridiculous little actress.

To this piece of gossip, related half in loyalty and half in spite, Anna Kyrillovna listened with a rigid and unmoved face. She showed the most complete indifference, but she decided to act at once. She was somewhat amazed to discover that her feelings were not so much those of anger as of jealousy, like any silly girl's. Despite the last few weeks' disillusionments she still thought of this obtuse, irresolute, plebeian soldier entirely as the creation of her will and hers to do with what she would.

Immediately she sought him. He sat surrounded by a throng. Everyone crowded around the famous general, as he sat lacing his tea stiffly with rum and told with infinite self-satisfaction stories of his deeds. The General's style was highly colored and a little sly, like the talk of a boastful old peasant.

Had any of them any idea, for instance, what a flat, dull country Turkestan was? A miserable dead level! *Now,* of course, a few hills broke the monot-

ony—quite decent little peaks with gorges in between. Five hundred Turcomans in a heap here and five hundred there—that was how his Kirghiz Cossacks had done it. After all, the whole lot of them were good for very little else, so why shouldn't they do something to improve their landscape a bit?

Kubileff laughed, pleased with his small joke. Round about, his audience of thrilled courtiers and pleasantly horrified ladies laughed along.

Just then an awkward incident occurred. Someone got up, and in a loud and opinionated voice broke in upon the General's discourse. The interrupter was a pale young man, at most thirty years of age, who stuttered and brandished his arms excitedly. Baron Nolken was the wealthy heir to great Baltic estates; and many were the curious stories of his eccentricities that passed current in St. Petersburg society. He was known, above all, by a morbid and childish mania for collecting, which he would insist on displaying on the most unsuitable occasions. Now, it appeared, he was riding his hobby-horse to a very unexpected offensive.

He wished to protest against General Kubileff's description. No doubt a victorious commander might do as he pleased with the territory he had conquered; but, touching his remarks on the usefulness and true value of these Turcoman peoples, *there* General Kubileff was totally in error!

Kubileff looked down at the young greenhorn with good-natured astonishment, and inquired quite cheer-

fully what he meant. Well, in the first place, these Turcomans, now that peace had been signed, were the accepted subjects of the Czar, with full rights of citizenship. And there was nothing derogatory to the rest of us in that, nothing whatever! They possessed an ancient culture down there, very fine buildings, tombs and mosques. And then their carpets! General Kubileff must surely have forgotten their carpets!

Kubileff said he had slept on them often enough. And very fine they were too, both for sleeping and for——. Well, with a wave of his hand the General attempted to cut short this ridiculous conversation, and poured another generous shot of rum into his tea cup.

The other, however, would not leave the subject alone. These carpets, now—he really did know something about them. He collected them, and marvellous things they were. Quite as important and interesting—he might venture in all modesty to say—as collecting dead Turcomans!

At this indisputably tasteless and most unexpected remark there was a general outcry against the young man. He found himself for a moment in a veritable cross-fire of angry, protesting and reproving voices.

Anna Kyrillovna, however, seized the favorable moment. When the General was somewhat dazed by the clamor, she took the cup from his hands, drew him out of the close-packed circle and pressingly asked him if he would not like to visit Olga. Leading

him through a number of rooms, she opened a door and pushed the hesitating man in before her.

The two little girls and their governess started to their feet. Olga's face became suddenly very gentle and open in expression, and with a pathetic little gesture of joy, a slow opening of the arms, she went straight to Kubileff. Anna Kyrillovna motioned the other two to leave the room. She herself remained standing in the doorway.

Maxim Maximovitch had sat down. Facing him, and almost between his knees, stood Olga, propping herself lightly with her hands against his chest. Then, lifting her slight body between his great hands, he set her gently in his lap. Wide-eyed, with a dim unconscious stirring of desire which Anna Kyrillovna did not fail to notice, the child gazed into the man's face. Kubileff had lifted her once more, and now was gently dandling her to and fro. He began to talk to her in short, broken, tender phrases, calling her "darling," "treasure," "little dove," "little woman" and "little sugar-angel."

The Princess did not stir. She suddenly saw herself as stupid, blind and foolish beyond belief. What could she want—what had she ever wanted—with that imbecile there, that knave, that *moujik,* that animal? And yet she did not want to lose him—not now against her will. Suddenly she fully repossessed her mysterious energy, which had been somewhat lost to her during these last weeks. Coolly and meditatively she watched the flushed, bristly neck bowed

over her daughter, listened to the man's childish babble. The animal! He was not even dangerous, merely a little drunk, as of course he would be when out of her control. The creature was unmanageable. No one could control him. She must rid herself of him. He was merely an incumbrance. He must be deliberately dismissed—obliterated. He had become simply a tiresome reminder of an unfortunate error of judgment.

Meanwhile Kubileff rambled on to the charming daughter. She must grow up beautiful—much more beautiful than her mother! She must become soft and sweet, and have shining eyes—eyes which would light all Russia, outshine all the beautiful bad women, shine upon peasant huts, army camps and mountains of gold, and ah! on all naughty old generals! Sweetheart! Goldilocks! Yes, pull my beard; come on, hit me in the face—that's right, harder, I'm very naughty! Oho!—ow-ow-ow. . . .

Anna Kyrillovna stepped forward, pulling the babbler up short. Without uttering a word she pushed him through the door.

Meanwhile in the salon the dispute had continued. Excited men and angry women combined in a body against the disturber of the peace, whose high plaintive voice could be heard in continuous protest. Eventually, the general fury drove him from the room. He was pacing up and down the corridor in a state of indecision, when Anna Kyrillovna and

Kubileff passed from Olga's apartments in a glum and swift walk. Young Nolken, dimly feeling that some apology was due, would have offered one, then and there; but the pair took not the least notice of him, and went past towards the front rooms. Nolken could not make up his mind to follow them.

After the uproar in the salon the solitude and utter stillness of the corridor was oppressive. Hubert Nolken, coming to himself, felt horribly ashamed. As so often before, for a senseless cause, his wretched nerves had snapped. How well he knew that people openly nicknamed him "The Idiot." Such a mistake, these carpets—his own personal delight—but that of course was no reason why other people—no, of course not! He continued to stand about helpless and dazed. There seemed to be no way of retrieving the situation. He was on the point of going in search of the entrance door in order to steal quietly away, when he heard a faint sound of weeping. At the end of the landing a door stood half open. Forgetting his shyness, he made straight towards it.

Olga was kneeling in front of the chair in which a short while before the General had been seated. Her rigid body was bowed into a little circle; at long intervals a sob visibly shook her. Nolken took a cautious step towards her, but she did not see him. For the first time in her life she wept, and her weeping was terrible, all-devouring, inexorable. She cried with her whole tense body. From head to foot she

was in anguish. Nothing else in the world mattered to her—she felt she must weep forever, so frightful was her loneliness.

Hubert Nolken tiptoed slowly round the child, considering how to get in touch with this unknown kneeling creature. He looked helplessly about the room. Suddenly his gaze was arrested; it had lighted on an object which momentarily claimed his whole attention.

There on the wall hung a carpet—and what a carpet! A most rare specimen, a glory, a wonder! Immediately Nolken forgot all else. Himself now a heedless child, and no longer walking on tiptoe, he made straight towards the brilliant fabric.

Then for the first time Olga realized that there was someone else in the room. Looking up with a start, she saw a slim young man just behind her. He had his back turned towards her, and was carefully feeling the hanging carpet, drawing the protruding threads through his hands, fingering the wools. Her little cry of astonishment made him turn around. For a moment or two the pair looked at each other without stirring.

Nolken was at a loss how to behave. He had never in his life had anything to do with children, neither in his brother-and-sister-less childhood on his Livonian estates, nor during his subsequent years of idling in St. Petersburg. He was accordingly by far the more embarrassed of the two. The strange little girl, who had just been crying in such a God-forsaken

fashion, was looking at him now with unmistakable self-possession; and he found it necessary to explain his presence. In polite and carefully chosen words he explained to her how he had heard *someone* weeping somewhere around here, and had therefore taken the liberty of entering. Olga replied with a little movement of the head, which plainly expressed an impatient dismissal of this topic.

Words stuck in the young man's throat, and he felt the next move was utterly beyond him. Then there shot into his mind the recollection of the other recent preoccupation, a most delightful and important one —the carpet! He questioned Olga about it and thus learnt that it was the General's present to the Princess's daughter, whom he beheld, as he now realized, in the little lady before him. The scene in the drawing room had already become shadowy; and now, certainly, he would have found it impossible to quarrel with the donor of such a marvel. He did not notice the little girl's shining eyes, in which fresh tears welled up at mention of the General's name. He was at once wholly absorbed in his theme. Looking rather at the carpet than at the child, he told her the story of the ancient fabric, as he from moment to moment deciphered it from the ancient design.

It had been woven, he said, some five or six hundred years ago, probably in Shiraz or Isfahan. Apparently, good orthodox Mussulmans had at first begun it. Then before the design had been completely worked out, the piece had passed into Chris-

tian hands, and the originally embellished letters from the Koran had been converted into a pattern of ornamental crosses and chalices. In this form, instead of being pressed on by the knees of praying Moslems, the carpet must long have borne the passing and repassing of feet in a Christian household. At last, centuries later perhaps, the Christian house had fallen on evil days. Hastily the last of the household treasures were sold, and the carpet auctioned or knocked down in an odd lot.

Now it came into a Hebrew household. Its new owner must soon have realized the old rug's value; for he ran thick, strong "prayer-threads" through the center of the pattern, a whole close row of them; and now the carpet served as a place for his devotions, and for those of his sons, and his sons' sons. Heaven, of course, alone knew how mixed the symbols of the various religions may not have become in that Caucasian-Armenian maelstrom! And Heaven alone knew how the carpet had fallen into Turcoman hands, to become eventually Kubileff's booty!

Of this tale Olga understood scarcely a word. While she gazed wide-eyed at the narrator, she thought how grateful she ought to be to Kubileff for such a wonderful and precious gift. It was strange that her governesses and her mother had never told her of its value. Yet since she was without a standard of values, these like all her thoughts remained small and nebulous, casual and only half developed.

Nolken, meanwhile, little concerned about the

effect of his words on his listener, had again become absorbed in the carpet. He was now silently engaged on a second and closer inspection of its pattern and texture. Then, swiftly and irresistibly the desire arose within him never to be parted from this marvel. He quickly overcame a faint scruple as to whether he ought to broach such a matter to this child, and asked Olga if she felt she wanted to keep the carpet always.

Her 'Yes' was unexpectedly emphatic. She felt a sense of guilt in not having valued her property enough hitherto. To part with it would be unthinkable. Surprised by the emotion in her voice, Nolken turned at last and looked full at her. Olga felt that she ought to thank this strange young man for revealing to her the secret of so beautiful and valuable a possession. At the very moment, therefore, when Anna Kyrillovna, having at last found time to attend to her daughter, re-entered the room she had left so abruptly, Nolken was bending amiably over the child, and Olga was gazing gratefully up at him, their mutual attitudes producing an impression of a confidential understanding between the pair.

The Princess's first reaction was one of very real and very commonplace alarm at having, for the second time within the space of half an hour, surprised her carefully guarded and secluded daughter in intimate conversation with a man. The two were actually so engrossed that they did not hear the Princess come in. Anna Kyrillovna paused for a moment,

during which no words, but obviously affectionate glances, were exchanged between Olga and Nolken. Then the two sprang apart as Anna Kyrillovna stepped angrily between them.

Fear gripped Nolken, though Olga was perfectly composed. Flushing darkly, the young man tried to find a few words of explanation; but he was arrested by the Princess's icy and terrible face and the scornful motion of her hand. She was astonished, she said, *highly* astonished, to find him alone with her daughter! Olga waited expectantly to see what Nolken would do. For a moment he stood helpless and awkward as a chidden school-boy, then took a step or two as if to make a very inglorious exit. At that, there arose in Olga such white-hot rage as she had never known, a wild ungovernable desire to act now, on the very instant; to do something startling, to take sides; in short, to play an independent part. Going up to Nolken, who was even more horrified by the gesture than the Princess herself, she seized both his hands in her own. Then shaking his hands up and down in the frenzy of her sudden decision, she screamed in wild disjointed phrases to her mother: how greatly she liked this new friend; how friendly he had been to her; and how he had told her all sorts of lovely things.

Without a word Anna Kyrillovna gripped her daughter's hands and tore them away from the young man's. She led Olga towards an inner door, called the governess, scolded her for her absence,

and gave the child into her charge. Turning to Nolken, she asked him to follow her in an unmistakable tone of command. He looked back just in time to see Olga nod to him and smile a sad little smile, as her governess pulled her into an adjoining room.

Nolken followed Anna Kyrillovna down the long corridor in silence. These few moments had wrought a radical and painful change in him. He was terribly ashamed of the wretched part he had just played. And yet he thought with a sudden uprush of joy of the little girl's constancy. How she had taken his hands in her own and stood by him! A bright disturbing ray broke the dark veil of his gloomy mind. Olga's face with its clear, steady gaze now stood for a long time plainly and unforgettably before him.

Nolken had all at once become fully conscious of his own isolation and eccentricity, and yet he did not feel that he was lost. He believed that he could battle with his own weakness. He was resolved to be as brave as this child. He must see her again, and at the earliest possible moment. Then, as Anna Kyrillovna took leave of him with an oblique and hostile glance, he kissed her hand speechlessly and went out.

In the street he dismissed his carriage. Whistling aloud and full of unwonted and happy schemes, he walked slowly home. He believed himself a changed man; his whole world was rose-colored. How glad

he was that he was rich! He could employ as many men as he wished. He could even bribe spies and informers in the Princess's very household who would not let Olga go out of their sight.

When Nolken reached home, his confidential valet was amazed to see that the young Baron would not so much as glance at the new specimens for his collection. He issued orders to procure half a dozen trusty fellows. When the leader arrived, Nolken mapped out with him a comprehensive plan for keeping watch on Anna Kyrillovna's palace. Without loss of time he then sent him about his commission.

Nolken spent the rest of that evening in happy reverie. He was like a paralytic miraculously restored. The joy of living filled him; he could not keep still for exultation. His fragile spirit, unequal to the impact of so much emotion, strove to unburden itself in immediate action. The young man actually toyed with the idea of burning all his treasures, tearing them into bits, throwing them into the Neva. All these coins and bronzes, carpets, miniatures and *incunabula* now seemed to him so much rubbish. Over and over again he reconstructed the scene in which Olga had taken his hands. He conjured up her mute furious defiance of her mother and that last sad little smile at the door.

He slept badly for sheer happiness. But morning shook him rudely out of his dreams. His spies' first report was that Olga, accompanied by a numer-

ous escort, at an early hour in the morning had left the palace in the Millionnaya.

Anna Kyrillovna, after a short deliberation, that very evening had decided how to act. To herself, she made not the least attempt to play the rôle of anxious and conscientious mother. She frankly admitted her jealousy, which with every additional month now would find more occasion to show itself. She was further than ever from understanding or loving her child; but she would, if she could, have a few years free of her. Soon, all too soon, her unwanted daughter would stand in her way—a full-grown, fully developed personality with wishes and claims of its own.

The Princess felt that for the rest of her days she would be alone. She could look for neither comfort nor support save in herself, and she was the more determined to draw strength from her isolation and torturing pride. She regretted she lived in an age in which one no longer could have one's children poisoned with impunity. And when she thought of Kubileff—God! how foolish, how childishly weak she had been! In future she would have playthings and devotees, but no confidants; she would enjoy what was hers and glory in her independence. She was still a power at court—she had almost forgotten that. She had nearly let herself go, but she had come to her senses in time. As for this Baron Nolken, the

fatal fool!—she would let him feel who she was. The silly impertinence of the man—to sneak out of her drawing-room and intrigue with that child! The impudent German must be taught a lesson.

And as for Olga, she must go, and at once. The Princess was resolved not to endure the sight of the irksome child another day. At dead of night the servants were routed out of bed; they were kept running to and fro, sorting and packing till daybreak. The sun was scarcely up before the carriages left the gates. This unseemly haste annoyed the servants. Olga found herself rather roughly handled in the dressing. The parting was taken in the worst atmosphere. The child scarcely looked at her mother.

Dimly she felt she was the victim of some paltry revenge. She shut herself up in so bitter and absolute a reserve that her hands were involuntarily clenched and her shoulders hunched together. Henrietta, sitting beside her, seemed far the more excited of the two. Their destination was the country seat at Ligovo.

It was not long before Nolken relapsed into inaction and despair. For hours he would sit motionless, staring at his collection of carpets. After the violent intoxication of unaccustomed agitation he fell all the more a prey to a heavy lassitude.

A few days had gone by, when he received a visit from a Gentleman of the Bedchamber, who advised

him, in a friendly way of course, to retire to his Livonian estates for a year or so. He was to obey forthwith. There, in the loneliness of his forests, the cloud over his spirit deepened. A breath of wind, a bird's song, a rain-shower were enough to reduce him to tears. Again and again a girl's image floated before his swimming eyes.

CHAPTER III

In Ligovo Olga was for the first time in her life a child, for the first time was free to observe, to decide and to feel. For the first time, too, she was alone, and that was the most important of all.

Although her entire hierarchy of lady's maids, waiting-women, governesses, tutors and stewards—some fifteen persons in all—had accompanied her from St. Petersburg, the strictness of their organization relaxed somewhat in the seclusion of the country. The women servants, alternately surly and obsequious, had less occasion to spy upon one another. By a general, if unspoken, agreement this sudden banishment was made into a holiday. At first for a few moments only, and later for whole hours, Olga was left to herself, or was free to seek what company she chose.

This was in the first place, of course, Henrietta's. It was not that Olga consciously and deliberately encouraged a closer intimacy; the idea of human friendship was still too foreign to her for that. But Henrietta ran everywhere at Olga's heels like a little dog; for she indeed felt that otherwise she would be completely lost and forgotten amid these strange grown-up people in this lonely and remote house.

Till then Henrietta had been merely one of the furnishings of Olga's vacant existence; but, now, by slow degrees, she became the companion of her waking hours—at first by virtue of mere habit, then gradually by force of the tiny bonds which form between even indifferent people when constantly in each other's company. From being no more than a servant, Henrietta became by degrees the confidante of all the little mysteries, which were Olga's first actual experiences of life.

Hitherto the child had been like an educated puppet; she had not been allowed to develop a single impulse, a single independent thought. She had no sleep save under watchful eyes, no meal without improving and pedantic conversation, no playtime without over-zealous grown-up supervision.

Now this crushed, apathetic little creature, this new-born infant of reality, stood perplexed before trees and meadows. She had to learn to observe, to play about—almost, as it were, to breathe. Slowly and timidly she went to meet strange, unknown Nature. It was with many hesitations and qualms of conscience that she indulged her first small free impulses—broke a flower or threw a stone into the water.

The single lesson Henrietta was at once able to teach her was to have a bad conscience. While the two unchildlike children ran about in the shrubberies and copses, Olga's playmate was ceaselessly trying

to evade the eyes of the woman she had grown to hate.

Olga's own great desire was to be alone, to sit or lie on her back and let the sky fill her starved eyes. The sweet smell of green fields and flowers went to her head like wine, and flushed her pallid little face till it began to lose its mask-like look and to take on childlike curves. She began to play with the grasses, plaiting them into baskets and gathering nosegays of flowers. Perhaps, even at thirteen, she might have become a real child, but Henrietta nourished quite other expectations of the little escapades they shared.

Little by little it began to appear that Henrietta's character of modest and devoted playmate was no more than a rôle, which she had sustained with considerable adroitness and success. Underneath, concealed with some effort, was another Henrietta, desperately craving for freedom and gaiety.

This Henrietta had for years cherished a passion for the theatre, all the stronger and more fantastic for having been deeply concealed. As the only child in a court official's very correct and well-conducted household, her knowledge of this remote institution was, of course, of the vaguest. It consisted at most of some half-overheard gossip about a grand-duke or the like. Yet the little girl had thirsted for this unknown world far more than for the brilliance of the court which her parents so constantly extolled. In the Princess's household Henrietta had

felt obliged to hide her passion even more carefully than at home. Gradually, however, the longing to have someone who would share her passion became overmastering. One day a chance discovery led Henrietta to speak up.

The two little girls' explorations had led them to a long gallery whose wide doors opened on the garden. No one else ever sat there, and it became a favorite retreat. Two book-cases there housed the library which Olga's father had kept at Ligovo. And down the entire length of the gallery, in two imposing rows, there hung portraits of her ancestors on both sides of the family, beginning with sixteenth-century Boyars with Tartar features, and West Indian planters in full-bottomed wigs and tropic dress. At the extreme end was Olga's father, almost swallowed up in an enormously high collar and thickly braided uniform.

The little Princess would stand gazing long and thoughtfully at that melancholy, narrow face. She could scarcely have told what chord it touched in her. Anna Kyrillovna had seen to it that she seldom had heard her father's name mentioned. Yet Olga intuitively felt something of the secret which was being hidden from her. Now with her mistrust newly awakened, she dimly guessed that here again, on an important subject, she had been basely betrayed.

Henrietta, in the meantime, rummaged in the book-cupboards and found many a treasure to delight

her, culminating in a little incomplete edition of Shakespeare and the classic French dramatists in huge folios. At this find the child was beside herself. Wild with joy she confided in Olga, who could not imagine what all the excitement was about. She knew, of course, the names of these poets, also quotations from their works, having dutifully studied them during her lesson hours. Now, however, she was expected to show intense interest, while at the same time absolute silence was breathlessly enjoined on her.

Amazed, Olga watched Henrietta take first one, then another, of the little books aside, refusing to be parted from it day or night. In one or another of their hiding places in the park her fair-haired, long-legged little playmate would lie face downwards, reading half aloud the love scenes from *Romeo and Juliet.* As she read she gesticulated a little with her hands; and her kicking heels were acting too.

Olga watched this procedure for days together. At last, hesitatingly, she asked Henrietta to explain. With a torrent of words and by roundabout ways Henrietta confessed her secret passion. She failed, it is true, to give a very clear picture of the world of her fancy, for she, herself, scarcely knew anything of it that was certain. One simply spoke before a great many people, moved about, and spoke and died and loved. Everyone got very excited and enthusiastic, and then you were famous and idolized

—that was about all. Henrietta conceived of a theater as a place always full of applauding people. She was really quite indifferent to the content of the plays she read. Not Juliet's emotions, but the adventures of a successful stage Juliet, formed the stuff of her daydreams.

As events soon proved, there was fundamentally no real confidence between the two children. Without any hesitation Olga asked the duck-faced governess to tell her about the theater. More especially she wanted to know about the actress's calling.

Now the duck-faced lady, as was to be expected, held even more tenaciously to the prejudices of the great ones she served than did those people themselves; and she lost no time at all in giving her pupil a very unpleasant and unflattering picture of the play-actress's calling. The impression she conveyed was that an actress was a morally despicable, ill-educated and superficial person who exhibited her person and her emotions in public for money. Such a calling could have no attraction except for vulgar natures.

Olga's uncritical memory retained enough of this description to enable her, when occasion arose, to deal Henrietta's genuine enthusiasm a cruel, if unintentional, wound. The poor child found herself snatched rudely and suddenly away from her feast of exalted emotion and forced to defend herself against the accusation of aspiring for love of gain to a distressing and disgraceful career. She broke

into helpless tears. Olga continued ruthlessly to torment her. What was the price of a few real tears on the stage? Three rubles? Or was one enough?

Henrietta was hurt in her deepest and most private emotions. This time she threw respect to the winds and flew at the startled Princess like a small wildcat, blind and spitting with rage. Her fury wore itself out and at last Olga's playmate recovered her temper and again astonished her by falling on her neck with wet, tear-stained cheeks. Olga, too, shed a tear or two, but more in surprise than in sympathy. The storm in those two small souls had subsided, but it had left much damage behind it.

After the quarrel Henrietta felt shamed in Olga's eyes and hid her beloved books as far as possible even from her. The first shy beginning of real confidence between them was once for all nipped in the bud. Olga, seeing her playmate's very obvious withdrawal, was annoyed and irritated. In face of this tacit hostility she soon began to feel more bored than ever; little by little Henrietta became again for her a thing rather than a person, a mere accident of her surroundings.

But she did not forget that the other child was weak and had a vulnerable point and if only to pass the time she found it alluring to experiment with this. She tried to make Henrietta speak again. She asked pressing questions which grew more and more urgent as she felt the fear behind the other's obvious evasions. She even went on to open threats, hinting

that she would tell the governess everything if Henrietta would not do as she wished. The victim was thus driven to begin her little recitations and performances once more—but this time with a heart seething with rage and despair, for she saw that they only served for Olga's somewhat malicious amusement.

A most unhappy little Rosalind paced to and fro beneath the trees, declaiming exquisite words of love and joy and longing. But in her heart was one longing only, which grew fiercer and stronger from day to day—at any price to get away from this place.

Henrietta's was not a revengeful nature, but Olga's tyranny awoke in her the desire to pay her back for these torments.

After the fatal visit to Olga's nursery Kubileff had hurried back to his hotel in a tumult of wrath and bitterness. Alone in his room he sat drinking and brooding darkly, and before nightfall was snoring heavily, sunk in abysmal slumbers from which he did not wake till after midday on the morrow.

As the events of the past day slowly became clear, his mood hung poised between fresh accesses of rage and genuine grief. At last he made his toilet, resolving to visit Anna Kyrillovna at once and offer her his apologies with what ease and assurance he could muster.

He was not, however, received at the palace—

neither then nor on the following day. He sent the Princess flowers which were returned. It was made very plain that he was outside his patroness's good graces, that she had done with him forever.

Moreover, he was soon forced to realize that a significant change of attitude was spreading with singular speed through St. Petersburg. People suddenly began to show marked reserve in their dealings with the recently idolized general. Even in Pan-Slavic committees the atmosphere was perceptibly cooler. At the same time a series of pinpricks in connection with military service hinted that the General's days of pleasant idleness were drawing to a close. He would have been well advised to have applied, on his own initiative, for some Asiatic appointment, but from day to day he put off the necessary visit to the Minister of War. Some spell bound him to the capital. He could not make up his mind.

He could not, in fact, forget Olga. He drank, and the more he drank the more firmly rooted in his befuddled brain became the longing to see the child again, if only to spite that cursed witch, her mother. By St. Cyril, he swore a dozen times a day, he would seek her out, speak to her, fondle her —his little sweetheart!—his darling cherub!—nay, more, he would carry her off by force! How this was to be done was not very clear to him. At last, however, his vigorous, primitive fancy could support the burden of fierce and tender desire no longer

and he confided the whole matter to his Cossack body-servant, Tjuma.

The Cossack was a reckless, cunning fellow, hard as nails, with the scars of half a dozen wounds upon his body and a pair of sea-blue eyes, gentle as a child's, most astonishingly set in an otherwise sinister and terrifying countenance. He had stood by his master in a hundred battles and affrays and Kubileff trusted him absolutely.

Before many days were over Tjuma had installed himself at a wayside tavern in the village of Ligovo. There he contrived to scrape acquaintance with some of the servants on the estate, and managed by spying through the palings to see when and with whom Olga took her walks. Finally he made up his mind to speak to Henrietta, as he saw the little Princess more often with her than with anyone else.

One afternoon he made short work of the barrier of gilt-spiked palings and crept upon Henrietta under cover of the bushes. Henrietta, in blissful solitude, was completely absorbed in committing to memory the rôle of a banished princess. At first sight of her assailant's terrifying face she fled screaming, but Tjuma was upon her in a moment and held her fast. It took time and much talk before she began to grasp his intentions, but when she did so her mood at once fell in with his plans. She, it seemed, was to lure Olga to some sort of rendezvous. Henrietta did not know who the General was, but she saw that a trap was being laid for her hated tormentress and this,

she felt, could be nothing but an advantage to herself. Tjuma was surprised at the readiness and zeal with which the little girl agreed to his proposals.

Two days later, as the children were sitting by themselves in the picture gallery, one of the garden gates opened and to Olga's indescribable astonishment, Kubileff came hastening towards her. She had hardly thought of him in the interval, yet now her joy was intense. For a moment she stood still, then rushed into his arms, hugging him to her. Maxim Maximovitch overwhelmed his "little dove," "little sweetheart" with a ceaseless stream of endearments. Then, seating himself somewhat precariously on a crazy old rococo sofa, he bade her tell him all about herself.

She found little enough to say and would soon have been content to give herself up silently once more to the old man's caresses. But he questioned her about this and that, about her governesses, about Henrietta, and so it happened quite naturally—for Olga certainly had no thought of spite at the moment—that she began to speak of her playmate's secret ambitions and plans. This was the very last thing Henrietta wanted. She tried in vain to make Olga stop talking, and stood there suffering torments till the very worst happened and she heard the General himself asking her to recite. When she tried to refuse, Olga ordered her, imperiously enough, to go on, and the children were on the verge of a noisy quarrel when Henrietta suddenly swung round and

ran out of the room. An idea previously conceived as a dark possibility became now, in her wrath, a definite and hostile purpose. She ran into the house and breathlessly aroused the duck-faced governess from her midday siesta.

The pair in the gallery had soon forgotten Henrietta's flight. Both were completely, if differently, happy. Kubileff, his arm about his slender little maiden, was considering his next move, while Olga dreamed of nothing beyond the nearness of a human being who was tender and loving with her. Besides, he was telling her wonderful things. Before their eyes as they sat hung the two rows of ancestral portraits, and a few random questions soon showed the old General that the child really knew nothing whatever about them. So he began to tell her stories of her forbears, first and foremost of her great-grandfather, the vice-king and soldier. Olga listened, wide-eyed. A world, unknown and hitherto unguessed, yet somehow very near and actual, was being opened to her. She asked the General about her father. He really knew nothing of him, but to his simple mind it was natural and easy enough to find kind and flattering things to say of an unknown and forgotten parent. Anna Kyrillovna's name was not so much as mentioned between them; the hate they shared, though unexpressed, was absolute.

The governess broke in on them, flustered and excited. With a sour countenance she stood before the little sofa, curtsied awkwardly to the famous visitor

and was at a loss what to do next. She felt that her situation was gravely imperilled, but she would gladly have concluded the interview peaceably. She asked His Excellency if Her Imperial Highness—but of course there could be no doubt of it!—knew of this sudden and unexpected visit. Maxim Maximovitch would have liked to take advantage of this cautious opening. He might have been able simply to bribe the lady, but before he could say a word, he caught sight of Henrietta standing behind the governess, her spiteful, observant glances flickering like lightning from one to another of the trio. He spoke to her, but she remained obstinately silent, a hostile, defensive smile on her lips. When he moved towards her she ran away, but only to the end of the gallery, where she stood close to the door waiting to see what would happen next. Maxim Maximovitch realized now the trap into which he had fallen. Unable to think of a way out, he turned to Olga and asked with an embarrassed laugh if she would not like to run and talk to Henrietta. But this seemed useless. Olga stood mute, all her happiness gone, while the governess still waited with anxious impatience for his answer to her question. He gave her none, but suddenly taking formal leave of the little princess, hurried away through the park.

After that the lady knew her duty. Anna Kyrillovna heard of the visit that same evening. All the sinister forces of her nature were at once awake and active. She begged an urgent audience of the Cza-

rina. At the interview the moral tone of the sentiments expressed by the two ladies was unexceptionable. The Princess's influence, seldom exerted so energetically, was strong enough to get Kubileff placed under orders with all possible speed. On the following afternoon he received instructions from the War Office to proceed at once to the Caucasus.

By that time Anna Kyrillovna was in Ligovo. There she held a strict enquiry, carried through with relentless formality. Olga was separated from Henrietta at once; the latter was to be sent home immediately, the Princess having determined in her own mind to send the girl some reward for her behavior on the preceding day.

But Olga had bitter hours to endure. For the first time in her life she was beaten and after her ears had been soundly boxed she had to listen to interminable, terrible revilings, of which, however, she understood very little. Standing dumb and helpless before her mother, the child was treated as if she were a wilful offender against honor and the family name. Finally she was told curtly that she was to be sent next day to an estate in the Penza. Her old nurse Agapia, who was living there, and a couple of waiting-women would for the time being suffice for supervision and attendance. Almost all her teachers and governesses were dismissed. A few new ones would be appointed and would follow later. Cut off from the world, she would soon lose

her taste for intrigue! As to the future, that would depend on Olga's subsequent behavior.

The girl was obstinately mute. She did not cry. In her heart she was glad that a great distance was to separate her from the strange and sinister woman before her.

Kubileff sat alone in the railway carriage. His departure from St. Petersburg had been almost unremarked. Very few of the national hero's former flatterers and importunate friends had taken leave of him at the station. He suspected that his sudden fall from favor was final and irrevocable, yet heavier still on his heart weighed remembrance of his sweet child, his little "devil-angel," whom he would never be able to forget. If only he had not hesitated—if he had carried her off at once! He might now have been sitting with her beside him in a railway carriage, the whole wide world before him!

He did not know that in another coach of the same train Olga, too, was travelling south.

He broke his journey in Moscow, where he looked up an old army friend living there on his pension, and together they visited the Hermitage, the Jar, and other less reputable resorts. Maxim Maximovitch consumed alcohol in poisonous quantities, till his grief took him by the throat and he sobbed out his misery unrestrainedly.

In Madame Rosenblut's drawing-room in the Staleshnikov Pereulok he had insisted on having

quite a young girl—a cherub—an adorable child—a bud!—and afterwards abused the poor creature sitting beside him, telling her she stank in his nostrils. His little one, now—how still and sweet she had sat on his lap! Her hair had smelled of sapling birch—of fresh moss. Yes, she was just like a little wild flower! But he would never see her again. Everything was finished and done with—fame lost—Russia lost. Well, let 'em all go! The Princess, the Pan-Slavic brotherhood—to the devil with all of them—he spat on their very names! He began to weep passionately, his body convulsed by sobs.

In Madame Rosenblut's house they were used to most things. Still there were limits. The guests might do pretty well as they chose, but they might not talk politics. And now here was this elderly and famous general shouting senseless abuse of Holy Russia and all sorts of highly placed persons! They tucked a final bottle under his arm and pushed him and his fair companion towards the stairs. At first he resisted and broke into a furious rage, his veins swelling perilously. Then suddenly he gave in, seeming to be on the point of collapse. Madame was greatly relieved at the docility with which he allowed himself to be led from the room.

In Olhovo Olga could not get used to her unfamiliar rooms. She slept very badly and woke at the slightest noise. One night, when she had been

there about a week she was roused by the sound of voices in the next room and by the light that stole in round the half-closed door. Hearing eager, excited whispering, she crept nearer till she could catch a word here and there but the talk seemed to be about things of which she knew nothing. The women were laughing and saying how odd it was—really most remarkable when one came to think of it—so famous, and then to die of a stroke like that in a brothel—in the arms of a woman of that sort! Amidst the whispering Olga suddenly recognized the General's name. The women heard the sound of a fall, and running in, found Olga in a dead faint on the floor.

CHAPTER IV

ONE EVENING in September, some six months after the assassination of the Czar by Grinevitzki's bomb, the *Naradnaya Volya's* local committee in Penza were debating how best to employ the services of a new comrade sent to their district from St. Petersburg. They had before them a confidential report upon him from the heads of the organization in the capital. The document was apparently a random medley of signs, figures and letters of the alphabet scattered over a very thin and much-creased sheet of paper and when deciphered by Comrade Golenishtsheff, read as follows:—

"For the information of the Penza Committee.

"Jevgeni Teodorovitch Dolichin—J. T. D.—aged three-and-twenty, an ex-university student, is the son of a noted member of the Extraordinary Courts. He was brought up in Kiev and St. Petersburg and was educated at a grammar school. At the University he studied German literature and philosophy. A few of his poems were published in the *Rossija*. He also wrote a novel of some length which was rejected by several editors. J. T. D. believes that his father, with whom his relations had been strained

from his school days, was behind these rejections. Furthermore, shortly after the rejection of this work, he received a caution from the University authorities on the ground that the elements of his story (a somewhat weak and colorless melodrama of peasant life) were politically objectionable. In certain literary student circles J. T. D. had been hailed as a budding writer of genius, and he felt very acutely the rejection of his work, believing he would have made his name by it.

"It was in the student circles referred to that Comrade J. G. (a woman) got to know J. T. D. last year. From the first he showed keen interest in the political ideas she tentatively advanced and soon became a regular reader of the Party's pamphlets and brochures, the tone and contents of which suited his injured mood and persuaded him that his personal discontent had a wider than personal foundation. He was next introduced to a few first-grade members of our St. Petersburg branch, and during the summer assisted on several occasions in the distribution of leaflets in the University. These activities led to his arrest and subsequent rustication, after a detention and examination lasting some days. His father closed his doors against him.

"At this point the St. Petersburg Committee had to consider the advisability of breaking off relations with J. T. D. As yet he had little exact knowledge of the organization or of the definitely terrorist activities of the *Nar. Volya.* His rustication had brought

him under the notice of the police, so that there was little prospect of employing him again on outside propaganda work. The usual policy was to drop such cases.

"J. G., however, spoke very strongly in favor of retaining him, and shortly afterwards he proved himself serviceable and skillful in the following circumstances:—

"After rustication J. T. D. had no source of income and lived in extreme poverty. He was, moreover, under constant police surveillance. At a police-court hearing, G. N. P., our liaison officer with the criminal department of the municipal police, was able to offer him well-paid work as a police spy. J. T. D. replied cautiously and asked for time to think the matter over. Within a few days he had sought out J. G., related the whole incident and asked what he should do. At a second interview with G. N. P. he followed her instructions faithfully, as was proved by G. N. P.'s subsequent report to the St. Petersburg committee. After this S. L. added her voice to J. G.'s in J. T. D.'s favor."

Golenishtsheff broke off at this point to remark that the "S. L." here mentioned was Comrade Sofia Lvovna Perovskaya, who had been executed five months previously. He then continued his reading.

"J. T. D. was accordingly employed on a variety of tasks in which he gave complete satisfaction. He succeeded in evading the police by disguises and eventually threw them off his track altogether. Last

winter he was entrusted with second-grade work and played a minor part in the preparations for March 1st.

"On that day he formed one of a chain of watchers in the Sadovaya and afterwards succeeded for a time in saving J. G. from arrest, whereas practically all the other participants in the affair were seized within forty-eight hours. When J. G. was arrested he effected his own escape at the last moment.

"We now think it advisable in the interests of the Party that he should disappear for a time. A tutorship in the country or some similar work must, if possible, be found for him.

"J. T. D. is unsuited for propaganda or other work among the peasantry as he is accustomed to the refinements of life. J. T. D. is by no means a natural ascetic. There can be no doubt of his whole-hearted devotion to the revolutionary cause, but it must not be forgotten that wounded vanity, not personal conviction, first attracted him to it. He is a man from whom to expect heroic efforts rather than routine work and drudgery. He belongs to that type of deracinated bourgeois who, in the light of his new revolutionary convictions, tends to regard all his former failures as instances of martyrdom for the cause. For the present he should be allowed to retain this attitude undisturbed. His vanity is well compensated for by his uncommonly magnanimous nature. In all matters of moment J. T. D. is absolutely reliable.—Intellectual education: excellent.

Sentence to be anticipated in case of arrest: death or penal servitude for life, on account of his active participation in the affair of March 1st.—Please notify us of your decision in regard to this man.—Burn this immediately.

"St. Pet. Comm. X. T. T., N. N. K., L. F. D."

After a short debate upon the report it was decided that J. T. D. was to be given the papers of a comrade from Kazan, a university student, who by order of the Princess Anna Kyrillovna was appointed as tutor to her daughter, Olga Borisovna, at the family seat at Olhovo. J. T. D. was to remain there six months. The following instructions were sent to him:—

"One of the most important tasks now before the Party is that of reforging links with court and government circles. In consequence of the recent arrest of nearly all our leaders and the fear thereby instilled into many of our former secret sympathizers at court we are cut off from sources of intimate information and warning without which terrorist activities are impossible in the long run.

"In Princess Anna Kyrillovna's household there will no doubt be opportunities for reforging some of these links. What is still more important, however, is that the Princess Olga's tutor may be able cautiously to influence the child in favor of future revolutionary enterprises. In conclusion, it may be pos-

sible to lend secret support to agitators working among the peasants on the estate, but this task must be regarded as secondary.

"The Penza Committee must be kept currently informed of events."

J. T. D.'s report, September, 1881.

"Arrived the day before yesterday. Introduction effected without difficulty. I live under one roof with the Princess and three women. These are, firstly, the governess—a woman of imposing stature, determined not to let one forget for a moment that hers is the supreme authority here; she received me on these lines, and put before me an amazingly precise time-table, that she evidently intends shall be rigidly observed. Secondly: the so-called lady attendant, a sort of superior lady's-maid, whose chief office seems really to be to spy upon the governess—at any rate we had scarcely exchanged greetings before she found means of telling me that I must not suppose she was a nonentity, that it only *seemed* so, and that I could find favor with the Princess in St. Petersburg if I placed myself under her protection and allied myself with her against the other women. Thirdly: Agapia the nurse, who, when I was introduced, was sitting with the Princess crooning old Russian hymns to her. She told me later that the little girl is a 'godless one' and must be saved from hell. Someone, obviously, has put the idea into the senile old

woman's head; and it appears to dominate her days, for she goes about continually praying and muttering and, if she can help it, will not let the Princess out of her sight for an instant for fear of a direct attack upon her by Satan, or something of the kind!

"The Princess herself is a very quiet child, repressed and perhaps a little backward. Her education appears to have been very disconnected and her knowledge is scrappy. The placidity with which she endures the atmosphere of this house—half court and half prison—can only spring from lack of comprehension. Except in the first moment of greeting she has not once looked at me but keeps her eyes fixed upon the ground and speaks in a very low voice. I understand that she has only just recovered from an illness of many months' duration—some kind of fever the nature of which I have not been able to discover. I doubt if the task of tutoring this girl will be a very thankful one.

"The estate is some thousand *desyatina* in extent, and comprises from ten to twenty villages. It is ruled, however, from another house, which no one from our house may enter without urgent necessity. The house we live in is rather small and at least a hundred and fifty years old. All the rooms are very dark and are as barely furnished as a cloister. The morose silence of the two ladies and the old nurse's interminable litanies seem appropriate enough in this setting. The serving women hurry past one timidly and I am the only male person in the estab-

lishment. I am afraid that my efforts here are likely to prove fruitless."

J. T. D.'s report, October, 1881.

"The sole incident of my first month here has been the discovery that I was completely deceived as to the Princess's abilities. She is a very clever and remarkably self-possessed child. She quickly understands and retains almost everything she is told, but she never voluntarily asks a question however circumstances seem to shape towards it. Her mathematical knowledge is considerable—otherwise her education has been fragmentary. Of history and geography, in particular, she has no adequate conception. It is clear that she apprehends intellectually what I tell her on these subjects, but she has not the least living appreciation of them.

"I have had no talk with her yet except on the lesson in hand. When that is over she picks up her books and goes away at once without responding to any general conversational opening. Besides, one or other of the women is nearly always present, making real talk impossible."

J. T. D.'s report, February, 1882.

"Yesterday the governess was unwell and asked me to take the Princess for her daily walk in her stead. But first she called me to

her room and told me some very remarkable facts.

"This prison-like house really is a prison. The Princess has been kept in this stern isolation by her mother's orders ever since some event more than a year ago, referred to by the governess as a fault on the Princess's part—a great fault, a transgression, a sin, the nature of which, however, she would not disclose to me. I was then, as it were, solemnly initiated into the gaol service—for so, undoubtedly, these women regard their office. It would seem from this that I am trusted, and that is all to the good, though it helps me little at present as the Princess herself still keeps her confidence resolutely barred against me. I have received more than one proof of her mistrust. To her I am, like the two women, no more than a conscientious gaoler to whom she silently submits.

"During our walk yesterday I tried to talk to her about St. Petersburg, about the fine day and the lovely, clear view. Once or twice she stopped, looked calmly and critically over the snowy levels and then walked on without a word. At last I asked her frankly why she did not answer. Without looking at me she replied briefly that they never talked on walks.

"I begin to believe my task insoluble. After six months I have not exchanged one unconstrained word with my pupil. My teaching must, I am convinced, be wretched, for it evokes no living response whatever. It is nothing but lecturing and repetition,

learning by heart and recitation. The whole thing is mechanical. Languages, history, physics, botany, are gone through in the same spirit of deathly indifference. The essays this fifteen-year-old girl writes are smooth and free of actual mistakes, yet as childish and primitive in content as the prattle of an eight-year-old. In the course of half a year I have never once seen her show either dislike, weariness or impatience. Her face is always the same. I feel as if I were teaching a doll.

"Since I cannot think *that* an important task, I beg to be otherwise employed. I must get away from this horrible house before I, too, become dulled, bored and indifferent to everything."

J. T. D.'s report, late February, 1882.

"I withdraw my petition for recall. The situation completely changed. Fuller information follows."

J. T. D.'s report, March, 1882.

"The occasion was a picture.

"One day I missed a *Histoire illustrée de Napoleon* from among my books. I thought I would ask the Princess about it and therefore went to her room, although the governess had several times given me to understand that my presence there was not welcome.

"I found Olga absorbed in contemplation of a

picture in the book, an illustration of Napoleon visiting the plague-stricken before St. Jean d'Acre.

"As I approached she started up with every sign of extreme confusion, the first and only emotion I have been able to discern in her in all these six months.

"She then apologized and asked if she might keep the volume as she would much like to read it.

"I should hardly have thought again of this little incident, however, if I had not suddenly noticed that the child's eyes were full of tears. Realizing that here was an opportunity that might never occur again I ignored her question and asked what interested her so much in the book. She was not adroit enough to invent an evasive answer, but stared embarrassed at the book on the table before her.

"At that moment she was truly beautiful. The delicate skin of her narrow, mysterious little face twitched nervously, while the dark line of her brows was drawn menacingly down above her eyes. Suddenly her face cleared, and quietly looking me full in the face she said that the picture showed her great-grandfather as a young officer.

"I was considering this answer, still at a loss for adequate connection between the picture and such intense emotion in a girl who for months had never betrayed the least hint of feeling on any subject, when suddenly she burst into helpless weeping, a stifled, continuous, painful sobbing. She did not move away but stood apparently unresisting till the

storm of grief had worn itself out. My reason for recording these details so minutely is that they vouch for the truth of her emotion and explain the increased candor of her subsequent attitude to me.

"What she told me a little later, haltingly and often interrupted by tears, was really little enough. I was prepared for most astonishing confessions after that despairing outbreak and instead heard of petty incidents, the trivial anecdotes of a grand-ducal family, the utterly insensate behavior of people with whom we have nothing whatever in common.

"The reason for this extraordinary banishment of a child by her mother is now in a measure clear to me. The mother, it appears, discovered that her daughter Olga, while living among a crowd of indifferent or cold-hearted servants, had found a single real friend and confidant in old General Kubileff. Against her mother's orders Olga tried to keep up the friendship. That is practically all. The General told Olga the story of her ancestry. The picture of her great-grandfather awakened poignant memories of this.

"She seems to mourn for Kubileff as for a second father. She has no idea of the kind of death he died. The General who perished on a battle-field so ingloriously can hardly have been a morally trustworthy father-confessor for a little girl, and so far Princess Anna Kyrillovna may have had right on her side. But it is quite certain that Olga had no inkling of anything in the affair beyond paternal

affection. The mother's anger seems to the child barbaric, for it appears to her absolutely groundless. In speaking of Anna Kyrillovna she uses the most cautious expressions, avoids the name when she can, and turns her face away when she utters it—all symptoms of bitter, irreconcilable hatred.

"This young girl, still half, if not wholly, a child, who knows nothing and nobody, who has not seen ten faces in her life outside the circle of her mother's domestics, is dominated and obsessed by this one emotion and under its stress has learned such remarkable self-command that I could be with her daily for six months without guessing her secret, mistaking her passionate and deliberate reserve for insipidity, her profound bitterness of heart for stupidity!

"The causes underlying this state of things are neutral to our purposes, but the character formed by them might become of the utmost value. Olga Borisovna has concentrated all the forces of her being on one idea, one purpose, expressed, as it were, in one sentence—*I will not be broken!* She thus offers the amazing spectacle of fanatical will-power without creed or objective. It must be our business to try to supply these."

J. T. D.'s report, April, 1882.

"It may be said in so many words—*Here is a life dried up at the source!* It never really began to flow.

It was choked by the sands of the desert before ever it reached a bed.

"I can now read this Olga through and through—almost as though she were some simple chemical substance given to me to experiment upon. But it is a substance that reacts to no stimulus, can be classified in no series, possesses no affinities. I see the structure of this withered, starved little soul clearly enough at last. It goes to one's heart. But she is beyond help.

"For example, it is impossible to awaken emotion in her by any of the usual methods. All that means nothing to her. One meets with no resistance, arouses no echo, evokes no experience; it's like beating oneself against a vacuum! She is unquestionably clever, yet her cleverness only teaches her to believe nothing she is told, to love nothing in which she might find salvation. In her nature two emotions only are alive and well-developed—mistrust and hate. Her mother's hideous example has taught her this—the one lesson, the one experience worthy of the name, in fifteen years of life!

"Under such conditions any real, effective confidence between us is unthinkable; both the end and the measure of its attainment are entirely foreign to her. She does not understand what I want of her. She is naturally inclined to be friendly to me because I share a little secret with her and have not betrayed it. But this is too small a basis on which to build real confidence."

J. T. D.'s report, June, 1882.

"The little Princess's birthday was three days ago. No occasion was made of it. Old Agapia chanted louder and more insistently than ever, and in the morning the ladies offered formal congratulations and a shade more devotion than usual was mingled with their bare-faced officiousness. No news came from St. Petersburg, nor any presents.

"I ventured a few cautious questions as to whether it had always been like this. Olga was inclined at first to think I was asking her out of malice, but afterwards she told me that her god-father, the Czar, always used to send her an enormous parcel of presents. Had she been very fond of him? She said she had never really known him.

"I tried to lead the conversation to Alexander's death, but she showed no interest and has, apparently, no conception of his end. As so often when talking to this little automaton, despair seized me! World-shaking events have passed over this creature's head without leaving a trace. Actually she is to be pitied. Embittered pity!—a strange notion! I had not known till now that such a thing existed, but it is exactly what I feel when I look at this insentient little doll!"

J. T. D.'s report, July, 1882.

"Yesterday we walked over the fields. The sultry summer air weighed upon heart and brain, but

Olga stepped as lightly and indifferently as ever.

"The peasants were at work gathering in the harvest. I pointed out to her the long rows of stooping women, the bare backs of the laborers, shining with sweat, the tired movements of the reapers. She barely glanced at them and said nothing. One feels plainly that she looks over and through the peasants—that to her they are not human beings at all. They, for their part, bow humbly before their young mistress. She has never spoken to a peasant.

"I tried to tell her something of these people's narrow and dreary lives—and found myself arrested by the thought that her own was not very different. Perhaps that is the reason for her lack of understanding. However that may be, she listened to me with a sort of impatience and an expression of utter indifference.

"To-day I attempted to carry our talk further. I told her of Stenka Razin, of Pugachev and of the peasant risings of bygone centuries. She heard all I had to say, smiling faintly and—the idea has only just occurred to me—perhaps secretly disbelieving every word I said to her!

"I can find no common ground with her which might serve as a starting point."

J. T. D.'s report, September, 1882.

"An incident has occurred. A young peasant woman took it into her head—God knows why!—to

make a complaint to me. The overseer has persecuted and indecently assaulted her, and I suppose in her terror she sought help from the first person she met. I promised to speak to Olga. She smiled incredulously and said that would do no good.

"Probably she is right; for when I told Olga she said quite coolly that I must talk to the ladies or to the overseer. I tried in vain to persuade her to another view of the matter. She would very likely have betrayed the unfortunate girl and myself by talking if I had not expressly reminded her of my silence in her affairs and made it, in a sense, the price of her own. She entered unhesitatingly into this disgusting bargain and at once dropped the subject.

"Innocence and ignorance, it appears, may conduce to absolute heartlessness as easily as to goodness of heart! But perhaps this child contradicts all the established maxims as to human character simply because she has none! If she were to be kidnapped and placed among robbers, blasphemers, or beggars, I believe she would, in six months, be as callous a thief, as fanatical a blasphemer, as whining a mendicant as any. Her character is totally unformed—but in this prison atmosphere she is insusceptible to influence."

J. T. D.'s report, late in 1882.

"I have talked to her again about the assassinated Czar. These conversations astonish her and, quite

obviously, bore her. During a history lesson I spoke of the mad Czar Paul. She was taking down my words in her little note-book, and was annoyed when I interrupted this senseless copying and became definite and purposive in my discourse. I compared Russian absolutism with the constitutions of other countries and was working up to a little hymn of praise of the French Revolution when the sight of her stolid face gazing at me dried the words on my tongue. I put questions, I tried to arouse her curiosity, I tried to make her wonder *why* Russia alone clung blindly and without modification to eighteenth-century forms of government. She saw nothing remarkable about it. It *was* so and must be accepted. That is the sum of her ideas on the subject; she does not trouble to put them into words.

"But how can she be expected to reflect on such problems when she does not rebel against the deadly meaninglessness in which her own life passes?

"Sometimes she stares at me with wide thoughtful eyes. Perhaps if she were not so alien a being from so unapproachable a world I could make her fall in love with me——"

J. T. D.'s report, February, 1883.

"I have now been here a year and a half. She has got used to me. That spells not confidence but indifference. It means that I have become a useful piece of furniture in her life. It means that it is hopeless, impossible, for me to carry out my plans.

She will be sixteen in June. Any change is out of the question.

"I now beg definitely to be recalled. It would have been better if this had been done a year ago."

J. T. D.'s report, March, 1883.

"When she was out walking to-day a peasant flung himself at her feet, asking mercy for himself and his hungry children. The Princess, of course, did not understand a word he said and looked round helplessly for her waiting-woman who was equally at a loss how to meet such impertinence from a common man. Olga would have turned away, but the despairing peasant clutched her ankle, crying that they were going to turn him out of his house because he had failed to pay his rent. The overseer then came upon the scene and tried to drag the man away, apologizing for the incident. These people were no better than beasts, he said, and he had had nothing but trouble with this fellow and his daughter. Olga stood there filled with disgust at the touch of the miserable old man's trembling fingers. The overseer abused him mercilessly and the poor wretch was beginning to answer back, knowing now that all was lost, when his daughter arrived to swell the clamor. She was the same girl of whom I told Olga last autumn. Ever since then she had cherished a hatred for her young mistress and in her rage she began to say things Olga had never heard before and could

not possibly understand. The overseer tried to shut her mouth, the old man fell upon him and a short struggle followed while furious oaths broke from the combatants. Suddenly Olga gripped her sunshade and began to beat the girl who at once ceased to struggle, staring in utter amazement at the strange, mute, daintily clad child who assailed her. Olga thereupon turned scornfully away. In the meantime the overseer had put the old peasant to flight with his riding-whip and now turned his full attention to the daughter, who sullenly gave back step by step beneath the blows he rained on her, continuing to scream abuse of Olga. Olga's governess then drew her away from the scene.

"I heard the whole story a quarter of an hour later from that lady's angry tongue and made instant haste to get speech with Olga. I found her roused to fury by the adventure. A flood of angry commonplaces flowed incessantly from her childish lips. I tried tactfully to put the case for the other side, but in vain. I was conscious of the same horrible, unalterable emptiness against which I have battered myself in vain for the last eighteen months. This nothingness, this useless skin and bone, this insensitive, inscrutable mouth, these glassy eyes, these clothes filled with dead flesh, this aimless breath, this piece of brutal ignorance! This enemy, already an oppressor because she has herself been humiliated and thwarted—she is the foe! Now indeed I have come to realize that the fate of the Revolution de-

pends on women, and on them alone. It is horrible, but even now I long to throw myself at her feet, to beseech her to go with me—to lead us all. I know—I know that she is a princess, an accursed tyrant by birth and breeding, an eternal enemy, and that one day she will pass with all her kind. And yet, could she but turn to us, understand us, fill with a blessed hope this heart that adores, and yet would annihilate, her! I am prepared to sacrifice all dignity, if only she would hear me. But she stares at me without understanding a word I say to her! I despair of myself—I grow unjust, impatient. But there was an hour which she will never forget! I told her to her face of my hatred, my despair, my rage. Oh, horrible—she showed no glimmer of response! Will she recall my words one day? I forgot all else—forgot that one of her women might enter at any moment. I forced her to sit down—I racked my brain for words and images with which to convince, to compel her. I stood bending over her, talking, talking. At last I regained command of myself.

"Slowly, with burning words, I told her of Sofia Lvovna, daughter of an Imperial Councillor of State, herself leader of many attempts against the Czar. Very calmly and exactly I described the tiny, girlish-looking woman, the small, firm, white hands that without a tremor made the electric contact that hurled eighty-seven of the Imperial suite into the air —those indescribably delicate little fingers that, on

the first of March, waved a silk handkerchief as signal to the bomb-thrower! For a few moments I became almost lyrical as I portrayed Sofia Lvovna's gentle, child-like face, the shy face of a young Russian peasant girl, always a little melancholy and quiet amidst the wild and resolute faces of the Comrades. In those eyes lurked fears which were never quite expressed, for they were dominated by the high, severe forehead above them—that cold, clear, smooth forehead which no one in the world had ever dared to touch till on April 3rd the executioner pulled his dirty sacking over it twenty seconds before the slight, modest, virgin body swung at the rope's end!

"And I spoke of Jessica Gelbschein, the poor little daughter of Jacob Mendelevitch Gelbschein, the fur merchant of Kishinev. When the soldiers came home from the Turkish wars they were allowed as a reward to hold a mighty pogrom. For three long days they rioted through the narrow Jewish quarters. Little Jessica, they said, was much too thin, and they stuffed the contents of a ripped-up mattress between her clothes and her skinny, trembling body. Then one of them slit the obscene bulge and with shouts and lewd litanies they pretended to celebrate the birth of a 'damned Jewish brat.' It was a game Jessica could never forget. Three years later the game became earnest. Little Jessica had spent long weeks shut up with a few revolutionary comrades in a cellar in the Sadovaya, where a mine

had been dug that was to send the Czar to heaven. The place had once been a storehouse for cheeses, and the air there was always heavy and rank. Our lads, Gabriel and Isaac, were big strong fellows who rebelled at the idea of a job that would cut them off from women for so long. So Jessica went with them. She was small and not very clever—little use for anything else. She said it was her duty to the Revolution. Afterwards, when all the assassins were sentenced, the prison doctor protested against the execution of a pregnant woman. Jessica was reprieved and sent to Siberia—a long and difficult journey involving many thousand versts on foot. The guards wore heavy boots; and if the prisoners did not go fast enough to please them, they kicked them in the sides, as one puts spurs to a horse. The new Czar need have no fear that, in twenty years' time, Jessica Gelbschein's son might take it into his head to throw a bomb of his own!

"Olga sat with her head up. She listened intently. I could tell that I had her attention, yet not once did she start. She stared at me, fixed and motionless, and in the end remained sitting, her face still raised to mine. She is stronger than I. I dare not stay with her longer—I must save myself—I must save my purity and my will. I was within an ace of kissing her on the lips—— But I fled to my room. I am packing my boxes. The carriage leaves in two hours."

CHAPTER V

ANNA KYRILLOVNA in her St. Petersburg palace held conclaves and receptions; she had become the confidante of the dowager Empress, leaving court balls with her on the stroke of eleven and bearing her company at Livadia in summer-time. A little lean, holding herself very erect, she could still claim to be a beauty, but she was lonelier than ever and prouder than ever of a loneliness which no temptation, no impulse of vanity, could ever disturb again. She was a woman with the intellectual austerity and self-discipline of a thinker, yet she felt no need of any express, any conceivable, object in her life. She had no intimate friends, nor any habitual associates, whom she would have missed from the ordinary framework of her existence. In this isolation the power she had once actively striven to attain gradually came to her.

It is just such detached personalities who tend to become the fixed centres of whirling circles of their fellow men, driven by the forces of desire and ambition. Members of the Pan-Slav committees, once Kubileff's associates, had not forgotten his former patroness, even if they had forgotten him, and continued to meet in her salons.

All these activities pleased the new Czar, who paid tribute to his murdered father's memory by outgoing him in a rigid orthodoxy of outlook. He soon began to grace the Princess's at homes with his presence, drawing her gradually into the inner circle of his occasional advisers, till the observant eyes of the court began to regard her as a kind of unofficial minister of state, like Frau von Krudener, who in days past had inspired a Czar with the idea of the Holy Alliance.

Anna Kyrillovna accepted the homage offered her with unmoved countenance. Whether the whole business was to her a serious matter or a game, she did not reveal. The dreaded High Procurator of the Holy Synod was a constant visitor at her house. The inner circle of her guests discussed over their teacups plans to combat the spread of atheism, anti-revolutionary edicts, exhortations to the Russian faithful. Ambitious generals, priests conscious of a wish to be metropolitan bishops, crowded to her receptions, from which, however, the court at large and the more modern diplomatic world absented themselves more and more.

European visitors found the atmosphere of her salons at once icy and stifling, yet could not avoid paying her house the tribute of special, reverential awe. For an attaché it was a semi-official duty, a part of diplomatic education, to visit the palace in the Millionnaya; for there, less thickly muffled than elsewhere in St. Petersburg, might be seen the veiled

face of Asia, that baffling phenomenon of civilized barbarism that eluded and tantalized the westerner beneath the sinister brilliance of the Russian court.

Anna Kyrillovna had become a veritable, a serious power. Her soul was secure and at peace. As the busy days slipped by she knew neither doubt nor unfulfilled desire. And yet in that set and ordered existence there was a single secret unrest, a single hidden uncertainty—the remembrance which refused to be wholly set aside of her banished daughter.

For a time she had almost forgotten Olga, forgotten her hatred and her jealousy, though occasionally she received reminders of that bygone tempest in the dull, respectful reports of the women at Olhovo, or in the arid empty lines written at long intervals by the girl herself. Now and then she had some decision to make as to a change of teachers. Moreover, it was really high time that she visited her property at Olhovo; but from month to month and from year to year she put off the journey.

Anna Kyrillovna had formed a habit of discussing all questions with the High Procurator; she therefore broached this problem, at first with caution and reserve, then more openly. She groped for noncommittal words but failed ultimately to conceal from her listener that here was a hidden trouble. As she spoke of her child's early lapse, she stirred the exalted ecclesiastic's zeal to save a soul so important. He continually recurred to the subject, his admonitions increasing in frequency and

urgency, till she was obliged to take some action.

Olga was now sixteen years old and the best plan seemed to be to get her married at once. The daughter of a feeble, agnostic prince, whose short life had shown more devotion to worldly sciences than to Holy Religion, ought clearly to have an appropriate establishment found for her at the earliest possible moment. There was a mingling of genuine contrition and misrepresentation of the facts in Anna Kyrillovna's account of her relations with her daughter which entirely satisfied herself. Much against her will she submitted to the inevitable and busied herself in earnest over her child's affairs.

She had never reckoned Olga as a factor in the sum of her life. The girl was a mere cipher, as Boris had been before her. But the set phrases and stock ideas of official religion and conventional morality had established sufficient hold on this cold woman to make her feel at times that she ought to be kinder and more maternal. She pondered on the necessity of evoking feelings which she did not possess.

With the aid of the Czar and of his chief spiritual adviser she began to look round for a suitable husband for her daughter. The number of possible candidates was not great, and among them the Princess's searching quest soon lighted upon the brothers Boryshkin, two young diplomats who had come to her house with good introductions and satisfied every demand as to family, fortune and prospects.

Vladimir and Dmitri Boryshkin shared a house in the Fontanka, as they had done from earliest childhood. They were the only children of Prince Boryshkin, now dead, and had grown up in great affluence. Their father seldom left the Czar's side, so that for years together his sons had not seen him. The Prince had unlimited confidence in the strength and trustworthiness of his elder son, Vladimir, whom he left, to all intents and purposes, in complete control of his own education, and he expressly placed that of his brother in his charge.

Vladimir was tall and strong and even as a boy his somewhat brutal features showed the unbending hardness of a nature that had never encountered resistance to its wishes and commands. While little more than a child, he kept the overseers on his father's estates in dread of dismissal by his scrutiny of their activities, tormented the servants, pinched the maids' cheeks and boxed the stewards' ears without fear of reproof. Dmitri, on the other hand, was a soft and dreamy lad, so entirely under his brother's domination that he allowed him to prescribe his amusements and even the very matter of his daydreams. Vladimir soon saw the advantage of having an unquestioning vassal. He fostered in his brother wishes and desires that must inevitably increase his bondage. He enticed him into all kinds of sneaking offences which, when discovered, drew their father's occasional outbursts of wrath on Dmitri's shoulders alone, even when the fault was none of his.

It was the same later at the establishment for the sons of noblemen which they attended in St. Petersburg. There Vladimir enjoyed the pleasures of unchallenged dominance almost to satiation and began to take his brother's fate seriously in hand. At heart he despised town life, yet realizing that fine clothes and fine manners were necessary to the full enjoyment of the power that was theirs by birth, he set himself to acquire a distinguished bearing and to exercise some self-control. On the other hand, he encouraged his brother to become a sybarite to whom three changes of underclothing and a bottle of *eau-de-chypre* were a daily necessity. In the diplomatic service they visited all the capitals of Europe, where Vladimir took his younger brother to brothels, encouraged him to form liaisons, and inducted him into all sorts of amorous adventures with a cynicism worthy of a corrupt old libertine of sixty-five. Incidentally he embarked upon a few such adventures on his own account, indulging privately in orgies of a nature which he preferred to conceal from the brother who regarded him as the undisputed arbiter of his destiny.

After his father's death Vladimir controlled the family fortune. He deliberately adopted an attitude of flagrant scorn for all things European and hotly supported the Pan-Slav movement. It was this interest that led the brothers to become visitors at the Princess's house.

Vladimir with his vigorous and lively temperament naturally attracted Anna Kyrillovna far more than the passive Dmitri, held as he was in the grip of secret lusts. For that very reason, the Princess did not consider Vladimir as a candidate for Olga's hand. She was thus able to talk the whole problem over with him very frankly, and in so doing discovered that, on the Boryshkin side of the affair, his decision alone mattered.

After a little preliminary manœuvring a long discussion ensued in course of which the Princess and the seven and twenty year old Vladimir came to understand one another as fully as if they had been confederates for years. A campaign was planned in detail and its practical execution begun on the spot.

As occasion served Vladimir let fall a word here and there to Dmitri on the desirability of his early marriage, accustoming his brother to the idea that he should be the first to wed. He then went on to stress the benefits to be got by alliance with a semi-imperial family like that of the Princess. He had beforehand agreed with the Princess that the young couple, when married, should retire to one of the Boryshkin country estates. Anna Kyrillovna, despite her milder attitude to her daughter, still definitely preferred to think that she would be housed a long way from the capital.

When all had been arranged she left for Olhovo to prepare Olga and bring her to St. Petersburg.

At first sight of her daughter Anna Kyrillovna was startled by the changes that three and a half years had made in her. The girl was very composed; she had grown tall, and she was unquestionably beautiful. Her reserve was no longer mere shyness but deliberate self-command, which lost nothing by comparison with her mother's dignified bearing. During the past year Olga had had time for reflection. Much that Jevgeni Dolichin had previously said to her without visible effect at the time had gradually worked in her mind, though with results notably different from those the young revolutionary had intended. She no longer attributed her loneliness, her seclusion, the terrible vacancy of her days to mere revengefulness on the part of the mother she hated. She had found a deeper explanation for these things. The whole painful and wearisome process was, she thought, no doubt sufficiently justified by the great position for which she was destined. Accepting loneliness and boredom as the lot of a princess, she became proud and self-reliant, learning by degrees to think of her condition as a necessary stage in her preparation for life, the difficulties of which it was best not to probe too deeply. As she grew older she gained the increasing devotion of the women who attended her and this, too, strengthened her belief in her new point of view.

She was accordingly neither excited nor surprised when the Princess arrived. Her dislike for her mother had actually increased as she had uncon-

sciously grown more like her, yet her hate could not distract her mind from the thought that the expected great change in her life was now probably close at hand. She therefore received the news of her journey to St. Petersburg with absolute composure.

Olga's self-possession troubled Anna Kyrillovna. She had expected to find her a tame and easy little person and vainly sought an explanation of this change. Well, her plans must move faster, that was all. Her jealousy reawoke when she pictured this proud girl in her St. Petersburg home.

Her fears were speedily justified. After arrival in St. Petersburg and a short preparatory interval given over to interviews with *couturiers* and dancing-masters, there followed a series of festivities, small parties and big ones, which were to culminate, according to the programme laid down by Vladimir, in the celebration of Olga's engagement to Dmitri.

At her very first tea-party Olga attracted the notice of Anna Kyrillovna's oldest friends; and she had to listen to a host of congratulations on possessing a daughter so charming, so clever, so beautiful, and so proud. Olga was courted by all, by the elderly 'Excellencies' as well as by the ladies of the court, who saw, perhaps, that the Princess, hitherto so invulnerable and above the reach of gossip, could be hurt by her daughter's signal success. Anna Kyrillovna noticed among the new beauty's most zealous admirers the High Procurator himself, who whispered to her with unwonted facetiousness that

all folly had now no doubt been permanently expelled from her erring daughter and that it was only right to follow the Divine precept and rejoice *more* over the repentant sinner than over the just!

Anna Kyrillovna decided that the prospective marriage must take place soon—the sooner the better. A particularly brilliant ball was to be the scene of Olga's first meeting with the Boryshkin brothers.

The series of tea-parties and small receptions designed to prepare Olga for her entry into society were now over, and on the night of the ball she found herself for the first time among a great throng of the people destined by birth and rank to constitute her world. Coolly and composedly she studied the uniforms, the restless hands, the powdered cheeks, the vacant faces of those about her. This, then, was the great world, this was freedom. This was the stage upon which one must live out one's twenty, forty, sixty years of life. It was a bright, bewildering scene, and perhaps one had to play one's part in it for a time to understand its drift. For the moment it seemed frankly boring, yet also intriguing—a thing which could not have been said of the boredom in the country at Olhovo.

Olga was standing in an attitude of easy grace, ostensibly listening to the words of a friendly old grand-duchess, though they really made no impression on her mind, when the Princess came up to present the Boryshkins.

Dmitri, acting on his brother's advice, had agreed to the plans for his marriage as he would have agreed to any other necessary task. He did not feel at all excited. On the contrary, he was somewhat distrait, having noticed as he came through the anteroom a small rent in the braiding of his green and gold court uniform. Yet at first sight of Olga he was so astonished that he started visibly as he braced himself for the introduction.

The girl before him had a little, nut-brown face, very soft in contour yet resolute, smooth tightly-bound hair, an exquisite, delicately curving throat. She wore a dress whose sweeping lines fell about the loveliest figure he had ever seen and the white sheen of the stuff threw into startling contrast the warm nut tints of her skin. Dmitri forgot the occasion, forgot his brother's admonitions and his presence at his elbow, while he stood lost in admiration of this girl. As he talked mechanically to her he noticed that her eyes were much wider at the inner than at the outer corners, thus forming with the level brows little triangles, whose sides he found himself constantly measuring and comparing. He felt thoroughly shaken and for some time could not regain his balance.

Vladimir had pushed his brother in front of him before making his own scrutiny of Anna Kyrillovna's daughter. He stood now unnoticed by the pair. He could feel Dmitri's intense excitement through the fingers, as it were, of the hand that still rested on his

brother's shoulder. His own gaze marked the girl's high, serene forehead, noted the pointed oval of her face and caressed the tiny hollows beneath the wilful cheek-bones. A surge of almost unbearable pain overpowered him, changing almost instantly to wild rage. His fingers closed in a spasmodic and brutal grip on the shoulders of the young man in front of him—the puppet, the clothes-prop, the ridiculous mannikin that he had, by his own act, erected as a barrier between himself and that unutterably entrancing face! But Anna Kyrillovna, with a meaning smile, slipped her arm through his and drew him away.

This, then, was the bride he had so thoughtfully provided for his brother! His brain worked feverishly, revolving schemes, subterfuges, ruses of all kinds, but in vain. There was no way out—his case was hopeless from the first.

The Princess was by no means blind to his distress and talked with deliberate malice of the pleasing picture made by the young couple. Vladimir found it beyond his strength to answer rationally. He muttered a few disjointed phrases of conventional courtesy, while a whirl of tormenting reflections resolved themselves gradually into the realization that he would never know a moment's peace until he had found some way of reversing, obliterating, annihilating this act of folly, this terrible crime which he had unwittingly committed against himself.

Anna Kyrillovna pressed for a decision. Olga offered no objection and in a few days a formal engagement took place. The girl submitted to Dmitri's love-making with some astonishment, but she was unconscious of any emotion except curiosity as to what would come next. Dmitri's own emotional capacity was feeble and unstable, so that the short weeks of the engagement were long enough to damp his first ardor. Himself impatient, he found Olga too passive and unresponsive. Once or twice he lured her into a quiet corner, tried to draw her on to what he considered confidential talk, to amuse her with suggestive jokes and banter. She was utterly at a loss how to respond and he thought her dull and cold. He compared her serene beauty with the charms of the usual companions of his nights and found it insipid and boring. It was, therefore, with vanity rather than a lover's desires that he looked forward to his wedding day.

To Olga all these events still wore an air of unreality. After years of quiet seclusion every hour of her day was suddenly full of crowds and clamor. The house was over-run with tradesmen, *couturiers,* jewelers, in preparation for a festival designed to outvie anything that even the most lavishly hospitable of cities had witnessed for decades. Olga was harassed and over-tired. There was never a pause in the senseless hurry of her days. Suddenly, as it seemed, the marriage morning came. The palace glittered with splendor. A great throng called down

blessings on the bride as she entered her carriage. In the dim vastness of the Kazan cathedral was a packed throng of uniformed men and bejewelled women. The whole diplomatic world was there. The Czar himself led his sainted father's god-daughter before the icons. Incense rose in clouds about the bridal couple and Dmitri, pressing his young wife's arm close to his side, forgot in that moment all his disappointment.

At the wedding breakfast the Czar was the first to greet the young pair. The meal lasted four hours. Dancing followed, and in the changing figures of the quadrilles Olga passed from one partner to another. In the intervals grand-duchesses and elderly excellencies embraced the bride, and the youthful aristocracy of all Russia tirelessly kissed her slim brown hand. To Olga all these faces became an indistinguishable blur. The unaccustomed wine had gone to her head a little; and she moved in the bright confusion of a dream, from which now and then a detached word or a pair of eyes penetrated to her consciousness.

Suddenly she was wide awake—it was during a *chassé-croisé*—and as she tossed back her head, laughing to shake off the overmastering drowsiness that had oppressed her, she found herself gazing, a little startled, into the face of a total stranger. The face wore a faint smile, which seemed to have been frozen upon the lips. It was infinitely far away, yet unspeakably near and intimate, now bending close

above her, now withdrawing in the moving patterns of the dance. Then, for an instant, it was still; the lips spoke words which she did not find it hard to understand and which she was destined to remember in every detail thirty years after. Then once more she was on her husband's arm. Happy excitement had brought him to her side. Awkwardly enough he stroked her hands, but she did not notice it.

A quarter of an hour later she extricated herself from a group of oppressively maternal women and found herself alone in the great, cool wintergarden. She walked quickly up and down once or twice, then slipped into a corner near the entrance and listened tensely in the unaccustomed silence to make sure that she was not followed. All her boredom, all her pride had vanished. Dizzy with emotion, she leaned against the wall and took up the receiver of a telephone. As her fingers closed around the chilly wood a thrill passed through her frame, throwing off the torpor of seventeen years. Her breast, her limbs seemed to warm into life and she sighed as if released from a stony spell. Then, bending down with her lips close to the telephone, she whispered a word or two.

This telephone was one of the first to be installed in St. Petersburg. It connected the wintergarden with the kitchens in the basement, where in a corner behind the dresser lurked Maximilian di Cortiselli, Baron of the Holy Roman Empire, his ear pressed to the receiver.

Cortiselli was twenty-six years old. He had spent his childhood in a small ancestral castle of great antiquity, near Fiume, and had been educated in the salons of the diplomatic world of Vienna, where, fifty years after his death, the ghost of Metternich still walked. Cortiselli had come to St. Petersburg a month ago as attaché to the Austrian legation and had been so far a little disappointed by the Russian court, where he had promised himself thrilling experiences, entitled already in his imagination *My Asiatic Adventures*. He was a wild lad, a wit, a charming talker. Until an hour ago he had been bored beyond endurance by all this barbarous magnificence. Then he had caught sight, three yards off, of the eyes of the girl who was the centre of it all, and thereafter had gone about filled with an unaccustomed and painful emotion, cursing himself for a slow-witted dolt. Finally, however, a plan had arisen. He had discovered the telephone; he had spent two hundred and fifty rubles on bribing the servants. Now he stood before the instrument in an obscure corner, reeking with the smell of cookery, like a peasant lad before a box of conjuring tricks. At any moment the situation might become acutely dangerous. But the bell was tinkling, and lifting the metal mouthpiece, he put it to his lips.

The bride and bridegroom left the palace at half-past ten. Across a sea of glittering orders and dia-

mond necklaces, Olga caught a momentary glimpse of Cortiselli's smiling eyes. On the steps she felt for a moment her mother's dry, cold lips pressed to her forehead, and then found herself seated between the brothers, while the carriage whizzed over the gloomy Nevski-Prospect. At Nicolaievna station the station-master was standing by the train to offer his congratulations. A special saloon carriage had been attached by order of the Imperial railway authorities to signalize the importance of this marriage.

Olga had two compartments to herself. A maid attended her, helped her to undress, and withdrew, curtseying. Half stupefied by much dancing, kissing and embracing, she forgot her surroundings and fell asleep at once. The steady roar of the train lulled her to deep, dreamless slumbers. In the next compartment Vladimir and Dmitri sat over a bottle of Cliquot. The elder brother watched the young husband as a cat watches a mouse. When he would have sprung up, he detained him in an iron grip. Dmitri must not go to his wife—not her, not now. Let the little bride have patience for another twenty-four hours. A Boryshkin could not marry in a *wagon-lit*. Let the heir be begotten on horseback, but never on wheels like a gypsy's brat!

In the morning the brothers visited Olga, took tea with her and talked banalities. Vladimir would not let his brother out of his sight for an instant. During a three hours' halt in Moscow, they breakfasted

at an exclusive club for members of the nobility and received the congratulations of acquaintances. When Olga reëntered the train, she was again somewhat dazed. A few hours' travelling brought them to Kolomna. Dusk lay already over the valley of the Oka. At the station stood a carriage with magnificent trappings, and a giant black horse, upon which Vladimir unexpectedly, and without a word of explanation, vanished into the gathering darkness. The carriage with the young couple followed at a gallop. Dmitri and Olga were for the first time alone.

Streets, fields, ravines, forests swung by in endless succession. Dmitri sat in absolute silence. Suddenly Olga was alarmed by a noisy tumult arising from the other side of the road. Across a forest clearing charged a compact troop of riders, surged around and encircled the carriage. They were the men of the Sergeyevsk estate, with Vladimir at their head, come to escort the carriage home. More than a hundred riders gathered around the carriage. They trotted forward in silence. Torches flickered, and hardly were kept alight in the jerky rhythm of the canter. Often Vladimir raised his hand. Then a short, hoarse shout rose into the night. Then the troop sang a choppy, screeching ballad in time to the horses' footbeats; and to the left and right of the carriage the riders' wild faces shone out, or were lost, in the flickering lights of the flaming resin.

For an hour, for two hours, they went on through

the darkness. The horses neighed and whinnied, and a cloud of hot and steamy vapor enveloped the cavalcade as it pressed steadily onward across the sleeping countryside. At last the lights of a large village drew near.

A church bell clanged monotonously. There were small gardens and houses. A crowd of girls in holiday dress crowded round the carriage as it came to a standstill. Between a double row of bowed backs Olga mounted six steps to the wide door of the manor-house. She was taken to a room, where many hands assisted her, numbed as she was by the bitter wind and fatigue of her long journey. The women undressed her and showed her a traditional Russian costume lying ready for their mistress. With her face framed in white lace beneath a glittering diadem she looked like some dark Tartar princess. Her tired eyes borrowed brightness from the shining metal, her slender figure in the tight-fitting bodice looked erect and imperious. A shout from the assembled peasantry hailed her entrance into the great hall of the manor.

She sat at table between the two brothers. Vladimir on her right, continually refilled her glass, while Dmitri pressed her hand almost bashfully. There was much singing, dancing and shouting. Huge platters with immense roasts were carried in through the narrow doorway. A white-turbaned cook made obeisance to his new mistress and begged her to inspect his realm. Olga was led through all the many rooms

of the house. Everywhere there was haste and a display of zeal, hurrying people, fumes, drunken faces. The whole household was possessed by the same fever; flushed cheeks and unnaturally glittering eyes met her at every turn and corner. The place reeked of roasting, baking and boiling meats. Out in the courtyard the horsemen couched about a fire before which a whole calf turned on the spit. Every passageway was blocked with hogsheads and tankards, benches, cushions and bundles of hay. The table at which the local aristocracy drank Olga's health ran the length of three large apartments. In the next room but one, twelve maidens knelt to Olga, presenting her with embroideries.

Dancing began. Vladimir claimed the first dance with the bride. His clasp about her waist was so sudden and fierce that she could scarcely breathe. The steamy air was loud with shouts and yells, the dancing grew more and more frenzied and whirling couples, closely enlaced, screamed good wishes to the bride as she passed by.

At last she found herself seated again, and again she was forced to gulp down glass after glass of wine. Vladimir would not let her stop. For the third time within twenty-four hours she drank, and intoxication followed swiftly. She lost herself for a time in a whirling ecstasy of color and scent, till she was suddenly seized with loathing of the greasy table-cloth before her, and almost losing consciousness, sank down upon her husband's shoulder within

the arm he had prudently thrown about her. Vladimir then picked her up and set her in Dmitri's lap. Louder grew the shouts of the guests and servants; Vladimir overthrew the table, kicking it aside with his foot. Nobles, peasants and maid-servants filed past, kissing the new mistress's hands or garments, fondling Dmitri's hands, courting the clasp of Vladimir's soft strong fingers.

Olga was past all knowledge of what was happening. They led her again through cellars, granaries and stables. Once she fell into the hay and Vladimir, laughing aloud, bent over her and caught her up to his breast. Some half-dozen girls laid hold on her, tossed her up, caught her again—high, higher!, while Vladimir stood by urging on the shrieking throng, shouting that they were not usually so shy and prudish! Olga staggered at last from the circle, almost sobered, but her brother-in-law was at once at her side, lifted her as though she were a feather and carried her back into the house. Practical joking seemed as though it would never end. Pepper was emptied into the champagne, a duck waddled out from under the table and fled quacking from its pursuers to take refuge under Olga's skirt. She was dragged hither and thither, sank upon an inviting cushion, sprang up terrified as she felt the prongs of a rake beneath the silken covering, went reeling on from room to room. Dmitri was nowhere to be seen but Vladimir never left her for an instant. She sat with him in an inglenook, the flames from the

great open hearth scorching her drunken face; but the words her companion whispered in her ear were hotter yet. He had lost his home now, he told her. He would have to go away. Would she be kind to his little brother? And would she be kind to him —just a little? Forgetting caution, he began to kiss her, to embrace her, pressing her back into the inglenook. Then some people came into the room and, cursing furiously, he lifted her up and bore her off.

The last vestiges of discipline, of self-control, had long since been thrown off. Out in the courtyard the riders galloped up and down trying to throw each other from the saddle. An orgy of drinking had lifted them all heaven-high into a roaring, screaming, shouting paradise.

Olga found herself, she did not know how, in a bedroom. Its orderliness, its whiteness, its cleanliness hurt her. She began to weep, but tears brought no relief. Her whole body felt heavy and poisoned. She was almost at the end of her strength.

The two brothers came in, the elder leading the younger. Vladimir urged him towards the pitiful, cowering figure on the bed, and stood alongside with a broad grin. Dmitri sank to his knees before her, stroked her body, kissed her hand. Vladimir came up behind him and gave him a vicious kick. He got to his feet then and seized Olga about the neck. She fell backwards upon the great white surface of the bed, felt herself shaken to and fro, struck in the face, heard malicious laughter and words, unintelligible,

horrible words. She felt she was suffocating, tried to free herself and could not. A door slammed and the room grew dark. Sounds of shouting and distant singing floated in; the glare of a fire shone between the window curtains. The last glimmer of consciousness forsook her.

CHAPTER VI

At first the marriage went well enough. The daily life of a great country house, hunts, dinner parties and picnics, afforded entertainment and variety. A constant succession of guests contributed to the happiness of the newly married couple by keeping them much apart. In the midst of all these distractions Dmitri surrounded his wife with daily proof of a superficial tenderness, which up to a point, simulated happy wedded love very effectually. If their relationship was not very close or passionate, it was at least harmless.

Olga, indeed, knew nothing of the deeper human relations. She felt a sense of release, of being able to breathe more freely, and took the shock of her sudden change for a happy deliverance. Actually she was as incapable as Dmitri of filling the empty days; and it was perhaps strange, since strong emotions did not enter in, that mutual vacuity did not succeed as well as mutual interests might have done in drawing the couple together. In point of fact the emptiness of relationship made it extremely unstable. Quite trivial matters, such as differences of opinion about guests and about meals, brought fundamental temperamental dissimilarities into colli-

sion. Neither of the two had ever known frank, friendly intercourse with a human being to whom they could speak of their joys and sorrows, in whom they could really confide. It did not now occur to either to seek for such a relation with one another. The longer they dwelt under the same roof and breathed the same air the more carefully did they hide their real feelings.

Dmitri took the first step towards undisguised enmity because he had hoped for something from his marriage. His expectations had been vague and full of contradictions, but he had thought dimly of a wife as a saviour, who would rescue him from his own tormenting weak condition. At the same time, his debauched nervous system sought more greedily than ever for satisfaction. Olga was to give him gratification and peace simultaneously. His claims on her were consequently violent and variable. Olga could hardly have resolved the discord, even if her strange upbringing had not been the worst preparation for such a task.

Her young husband soon showed himself disillusioned and angry. He was incapable of self-control, having all his life been encouraged to give rein to every wish, every lust. He therefore made compromise impossible from the first. Both soon relapsed into their customary secretiveness—Olga into embittered isolation, Dmitri into moody ill temper.

Yet Olga would have been spared the limit of wretchedness if she had been alone with Dmitri.

Apart from any real awakening, her life might perchance have pierced the frosts of her childhood and burgeoned into the stunted florescence of average married life among the provincial aristocracy, a type of marriage which has existed, indeed, among all classes at all epochs and which convention alone can dignify with the name of Holy Matrimony. But from the first Vladimir was beside her—waiting. Despite his sentimental appeal on the wedding night he had not gone away. He had easily yielded to his brother's first persuasions to stay, and afterwards there had been no more talk of departure. He lived independently in a wing of the manor house and took malicious pleasure in watching the increasing frequency of explosions of temper between the pair caused by boredom and mutual lack of understanding.

What did he want? It was his nature to take what he desired without hesitation or pity. In Vladimir love and malice, desire and cruelty, were not only close bedfellows but at times of strong emotion these were actually fused into a single terrible and destructive torrent of unrestrained lust for conquest. What he could not wholly possess he was determined to destroy. For him Olga was merely a quarry to be hunted and brought down by the most amusing sporting methods available. Law and the traditions of his caste forbade that the chase should be open, but under the screen of brotherly affection and authority he would run down his quarry none the less. He

calculated that Dmitri would presently tire of freedom and would hanker for the bit and bridle once more, and that at about the same time Olga would appeal to him for help.

Vladimir well knew his brother but his estimate of Olga was false. In her brother-in-law's presence she made no complaints but consistently maintained a defiant attitude. After some months of independence Dmitri returned in almost a penitent mood to his elder brother's protection and rule; whereas the latter, cheated of the double triumph he had expected, became more than ever both champion and tyrant to the weakling.

With Olga he tried to assume the rôle of sagacious go-between, but she was too mistrustful to fall into the snare. She felt the falsity, the barely veiled impatience and malice underlying his fair words. She was unapproachable. Vladimir could find no joint in her armor where he might inflict a wound. He then made a practice of spurring on his brother to see how far he could go in petty humiliation of his wife. He persuaded Dmitri, in a way flattering to his vanity, that the wife delivered thus helpless into her husband's hand was a possession that he might govern and abuse without consulting his brother. Dmitri found this notion so enticing that in everything else he submitted supinely to Vladimir, even countenancing the other's harsh manner towards himself.

Ultimately the punishment fell upon Olga. The

wretched Dmitri's only independent action consisted in passing on his miseries in heightened form to others. He soon came to believe that Olga was the guilty origin of his misery and thwarted desires. He held her responsible for his uncontrolled passions, and was thus able to indulge himself while retaining a sense of virtue and integrity. Olga innocently did him the further favor of insulting him by her imperturbability and boring him by her non-resistance. He saw that she was less vulnerable than he. He wasted himself in beating against the strong wall of her pride and silent reserve and left everything else to his stronger brother.

Thus began a horrible, ruthless, vulgar struggle, a murderous, brutal tussle of wills in an atmosphere unlit by a single ray of sympathetic understanding. Dmitri began with petty pin-pricks senseless displays of jealousy; he quarreled with his wife before guests and showed pointed neglect before friends. He forced Olga to ride with wild hunting parties to the limit of her strength, to sleep in the open, to sit silent in the coarse company of huntsmen.

Olga offered no resistance and met abuse with silent contempt. Vladimir, however, was determined to excite her to strong emotion and drive her to open combat. He said as much openly to his brother. Together they contrived their attacks on her, like careful scientific experiments. They went from estate to estate, spent days on the road, and held wild orgies, at which Dmitri kissed the willing serving

maids under his wife's eyes and used the *nagaika* with drunken brutality.

Olga might, perhaps, have been driven to negotiate with her persecutors had not a yet more tyrannous force come to levy toll on her strength. She found she was with child. For a moment Dmitri softened at the unexpected news. Vladimir, however, hailed this opportunity for further refinements of torture. In the fifth month of her pregnancy the girl was dragged against her will to witness a terrible spectacle, the public execution of a number of revolutionaries at Tula. After all the anguish that had gone before, her nerves could not bear this. In a strange town, in a primitive hospital, she endured the agonies of a miscarriage; it broke her strength and long left her weak and ailing. She was at the end of her endurance. The awful tension of two years broke in tears she could not check. She lay helpless in her room. The well-paid physician was a creature of the Boryshkins. Indifferent attendants brought food and then hastened away. Dmitri was now tired of his game; but before returning sobriety could perchance soften his heart Vladimir hurried him away to a distant part of the country.

It was many weeks before Olga could at last stand unsteadily on her feet. Where should she go? She could go nowhere but to her husband's house and to the inevitable humiliations awaiting her there.

At Sergeyevsk Olga lived solitary among servants, who were still utter strangers to her. She had not

learned how to win affection from any human being, least of all how to enlist the sympathies of the despised ministrants of her narrow world. Now she was subject to the dull-witted rule of these people as she had formerly been to the tyranny of her mother's deputies. In little things her wishes were negligently met. She had no money and not a friend in the world. Her mother's rare letters meant nothing more to her than the effort of composing barren formal replies. As the dreary empty days went by, her few real experiences of life—Kubileff's affection, Nolken's kind, incomprehensible talk, certain strange, wild words heard over the telephone on her wedding night—paled and faded from her memory.

She tried to fill her time with one thing and another, but the steward of the estate withstood any attempt on her part to interest herself in the affairs of the manor by an appeal to Dmitri's express orders. She practised for hours on an old pianoforte, very much out of tune. As a child she had not shone as a pianist, but she now began to develop real talent. Later on she ordered numerous books from the capital, and as she read of others' tragedies, forgot for a little her own almost unbearable, incessant and changeless misery.

Life and time seemed to stand still for her. The household furniture, the china, the ever-pervading smell of roast meats, the fat pony on which she took her rare rides, all became horribly familiar. She would even have been glad to hear crazy old

Agapia's singing. Even the priest who came sometimes to the castle was, she could see, a spy of the Boryshkins'. She got a habit of taking long walks, conscious, however, that she was constantly followed by inescapable spying eyes.

From time to time the brothers returned home unexpectedly. Their arrivals ceased to impress her. Vladimir would stare at her inquisitively, gazing into her face with an impudent curiosity he made hardly an attempt to disguise. Wild carousals went on in the house; no one troubled to conceal from the hostess that actresses and singers from the cabarets of Odessa were among her guests. Everyone, it seemed, ignored her and sometimes Dmitri did not speak to her for days after his arrival. She experienced the bitterest extreme of utter dereliction—she was absolutely disregarded.

Olga was twenty years old. She was naturally proud and indomitable. Hers was a nature not easily to be broken, but this empty life, devoid of incident or aim, began to wear her down. She had neither the comfort of hope nor the support of happy memory. Circumstances made her the helpless prey of her own despair.

Then her body began to rebel; her rich young blood, her sound limbs craved for action, for fulfilment. Cut off from the least semblance of activity or of vital experience, soul and body began to wither.

But before Olga lost hold upon herself she had to wage a terrible struggle with her latent powers. Many things gave treacherous aid in the battle of self with self. Even the music she called forth with her fingers from the keyboard became, by subtle misuse, a kind of drug, making her soft and frail until her consciousness itself dissolved in an ecstasy of weeping. She gave up whole nights to reading until the lines of print became for her thick, close-meshed hedges behind which an unknown world, bright and clear, mocked her with a promise of freedom that secretly she found more terrifying than loneliness. She peered through hundreds and hundreds of such hedges till her mind got confused and she seemed to wander in eerie thickets of strange deformed alphabets. In these impenetrable groves of evil, abusive, tortured words lurked melancholia's monstrous brood, whose talons fastened upon her. She could not escape—she had not discovered the refuge of ordered meditation. She breathed, she slept and woke, ate and drank, grew hungry, grew weary, and all was to no purpose, futile, without goal or meaning. Yet the servants and the maids hurried to and fro, busy, or angry, or joyous! They must surely have some reason for it all—or was it merely that they were too stupid to realize the senselessness of their movements? But then there was Dmitri, with his parties and his perpetual journeys, flying into a passion every time she spoke to him, and there was Vladimir, watching her, tense, curious, full

of angry impatience! Whence came their zest in all these things? Was she alone, like a guilty thing, outcast, vacant, lost? Day by day such questions weighed upon her. She could find no answer but wretched tears.

Even now she did not break. In self-conflict all the forces of her being played their parts. Days of profound melancholia alternated with shattering attacks of hysterical excitement. Tempests of aimless rage broke from the poor girl's helpless, empty heart—she smashed china and struck at the grinning faces of her maids. Letters of complaint reached the brothers and Vladimir urged a return home. He saw the end approaching.

On their arrival a futile inquiry was held in an atmosphere of secrecy. Olga was subjected to humiliating questions and confined to her room where she had to endure repulsive manifestations of malice on the part of Dmitri, who revelled in the rôle of an avenging deity. At length, after a wordy quarrel, he attempted to box her ears, whereupon she bit his hand and began to run, crawl and clamber about the room like a mad woman, almost moving her husband to pity and to a decision to leave her in peace. But Vladimir had no such intention. In the night he urged his brother to enter her room and when Dmitri saw the sleeping girl lying defenceless before him savage desire to make her suffer gripped him like a fever. He threw himself upon her, struck and half throttled her. Between sleep and

waking Olga grappled with her assailant and bore him with her to the floor, where the pair rolled over and over like raving lunatics. At sound of the struggle Vladimir rushed into the room followed by attendants with cords and ropes, which had been kept ready at hand. For three days Olga lay bound. A doctor of repute then visited her. Olga would not answer his questions but struck at and defied him. Once again hands were laid on her, binding her from head to foot. That was the end.

Dmitri wrote a fit and proper letter to the Princess Anna Kyrillovna, informing her of the doctor's distressing verdict. In the interests of both families it would doubtless be advisable to keep Olga under careful control in the country. When Anna Kyrillovna received this letter she spent many hours in prayer with the High Procurator, who sighed deeply as he thought of the slender form of this unfortunate victim of demoniacal possession. Looking him full in the face, the Princess said her sorrow prevented her from visiting her unhappy child. Later on, however, she sent her daughter a specially blessed icon of the Mother of God.

It was high summer. Anna Kyrillovna played whist with the Czar and nursed the projects of her *protégés* more zealously than ever. Vladimir had been appointed to the Roman embassy. Dmitri lived within convenient reach of his brother on the

Riviera, to the benefit of his shattered nerves and the profit of the bathing *demimonde*.

Far away in Russia the corn stood thick and golden for harvest. Reapers went singing to their labor, a clatter of plates and dishes rose from the kitchens.

Olga's room measured seven *arshina* by eleven. All the furniture was thickly padded, and although it was July the stove was kept alight, for a warm atmosphere would keep the occupant weak and lethargic. The windows could be opened a very little at the top and only from outside. The room contained no book, no picture, no gay-colored material.

It was in this room that Olga came fully to herself. That horrible struggle in the night, the violence that had overpowered her, had roused her from the soft melancholic state into which she had been sinking only to throw her into this lifeless vacuum. After that bitter humiliation she could have nothing worse to fear. The idea of suicide did not occur to her, simply because that sort of thing was outside her knowledge and experience. She grew calm and watchful, waiting for the next change of fortune. She even hoped for help from her mother. But months succeeded to months; and piecing out the few words her morose attendant let fall, she gathered that her small world had deliberately consigned her to oblivion. Thrown wholly back upon herself, ignorant of the degree of her own

misery, yet supported by a gradual revival of pride, she summoned up all her power to endure.

In that wretched, stifling cell her mind worked with a steely clarity. All the small incidents of her past—Dolichin's words, strange peasant faces, the evil lines round Vladimir's eyes, the many horrors she had recently lived through—evolved into logical sequence, leading up to a plain conclusion.

The world, she decided, was entirely hostile and evil. One could hold one's own in it only by getting power over others such as Anna Kyrillovna and the Boryshkin brothers possessed. This was the only law of life one needed to know. Peasants and servants did not know it. It had hitherto been carefully hidden from her. She might never be free again. She might remain shut up with her great discovery for five, fifteen, thirty years within these four drab walls. But it was hers now forever. At last she understood. A ray of light had pierced the terrifying darkness. She could now dream of resistance. And someday she might again be free. She would see to it that by then she had enough malign power stored up in her heart to ensure that never, never again would she let herself be enslaved. She herself would enslave others, torment them, oppress them, for therein lay the great secret of life. Shut up in a tiny room in a remote country house, this woman dreamed of subjugating the world.

At first she pondered and rejected many plans of escape, but the walls were strong, the attendants

frequently changed and obstinately taciturn. She had, indeed, no means of influencing them. And if she escaped whither could she go? She belonged nowhere and to no one. She was alone, as, she supposed, everyone was alone until he or she had strength and evil power sufficient to compel others to lend aid. She had won this insight too late, she feared, to act upon it, but not too late to save her spirit from breaking. She must wait for her opportunity. She could do no more. For this she must fortify spirit and body.

She paced swiftly up and down her narrow room, perpetually combating the temptation to lie passive. She recited aloud all that she could remember of her lessons—words, numerals, maxims, together with hosts of quite trivial remarks made by former teachers and governesses. Every word she had ever heard now became a treasure, carefully hoarded. This exercise, pursued month after month, developed her naturally strong memory. One image recalled another, one recollection gave rise to a second, till the once barren landscape of her mind bore dark forests of strang and sinister thought and bright cities, pulsating with vigorous, phantasmally evil life.

The soul of Olga was still imprisoned, spell-bound by her own will. Like the Sleeping Beauty it lay untouched by emotion, unweakened by disillusion, shut within the enchanted circle of infancy, while a tangled hedge of ideas and purposes grew ever closer and denser about its slumbers. No savior

prince, however magically endowed, would ever be able to break through and end that sleep.

When Vladimir visited Olga in the second or third year of her captivity he no longer found her attractive. She had begun to age a little, her dress and person were slovenly, and she kept obstinate silence. He believed, not unnaturally, that she had long since become really mad.

CHAPTER VII

MAXIMILIAN, Baron di Cortiselli, inherited his father's very considerable fortune some six months after his appointment to the Austrian Embassy in St. Petersburg. In Vienna everyone expected that the young attaché, an idle young man of fashion, would throw up the service forthwith. But Cortiselli was much too happy in St. Petersburg. He merely altered his manner of living somewhat, took a twenty-room house in Liteyny, and entertained there on a scale considered lavish even by Russian standards. His ambassador, rightly estimating his qualities, employed him thenceforward chiefly in a social and ornamental capacity.

Cortiselli fulfilled these duties with admirable zeal. Maxim Antonovitch, as they called him at the Imperial Yacht Club and at Donon's, was free from the rather self-sufficient, western conceit of the other young diplomats. He sprang, to be sure, from a Ragusa family with a good fifteen hundred years of history behind it. The service of an upstart family like the Hapsburgs, necessitated living on a grander scale than barons and counts with titles dating from the Crusades were able to afford. In any case the young fellow employed a Viennese

cook who soon became a minor celebrity by introducing such fruits of civilization as *Töpfenstrudel,* red peppers and black coffee into a barbarian land. At an unending series of dinners, receptions and theatre parties, Maximilian met and made friends with a number of young Russian princes and noblemen, among them with Vladimir Boryshkin.

Cortiselli had long ago forgotten his little escapade at Olga's wedding. The fleeting comedy of a few rash, ardent words, sputtering into silence over an electric wire, lay long forgotten behind secret sledging parties and dangerous nights of passion and sweetness. *Asiatic adventures* had not been wanting.

As chance would have it, Maximilian engaged, on Prince Vladimir's recommendation, a first-rate huntsman and groom, a splendid looking fellow over six feet tall, who had once been employed at Sergeyevsk. In the long hours of waiting for game the Baron heard Petja tell many a story of his earlier life. Sometimes the man spoke of his former mistress: "As Your Honor knows, the mad princess they've had to shut up in a cell." But it never crossed Cortiselli's mind to connect her with the woman who had so strongly stirred him for one brief hour.

Petja stayed with his master many years and travelled with him on his various diplomatic missions. Hunting wild boar near Madrid or deer in the Scottish Highlands, Maximilian through his talks

with his groom was often reminded of Olga Borisovna, without ever actually remembering her.

Petja did not see his native land till ten years later, when Cortiselli went to spend a holiday elk-hunting with friends in Courland.

The chase had lasted two days and carried the party across the Livonian frontier. Late on the second day Maximilian found himself separated many miles from the rest of the hunt. The evening was damp and misty with an autumn chill in the air. Maximilian was glad when he stumbled in the midst of the vast forest upon a small castle. The owner offered him a night's hospitality.

After dinner the two gentlemen sat by the fire exchanging reminiscences of St. Petersburg days, now almost as remote to the whilom attaché as to his host, Baron Hubert von Nolken, who had never revisited the capital since his not entirely voluntary departure from it nearly fifteen years earlier. The Baron, however, seemed to be very well informed about persons and circumstances connected with the court; and in his weary, slightly blurred voice he asked his guest some very pertinent and searching questions. Amongst other matters he repeatedly spoke of the Boryshkin family. Maximilian was able to tell him something of his former acquaintanceship with Vladimir, but otherwise had little personal news to relate. Before they parted for the night,

however, he did mention that his groom had once been in service at Sergeyevsk.

When Cortiselli came down next morning he did not see his host and was told that he had gone out some hours earlier on his daily walk. Oddly enough Petja also was nowhere to be found. As, somewhat bored, he roamed alone through the house, his attention was excited by the unusual magnificence with which the rooms were furnished. On all sides were notable treasures in Asiatic bronzes, antique coins, miniatures and other works of art that one would not expect to find in this remote little castle. Most striking of all, however, were the magnificent carpets of all sorts and sizes that bedecked walls, ceilings and floors with soft and brilliant coloring. Striking, too, was the complete absence of pictures, such as usually hang yellowing by the dozen on the walls of small country houses.

Cortiselli's wanderings brought him at last to Nolken's study. Delicacy suggested that he should hurry through it towards a French window giving on the gardens, but his attention was arrested in passing by a large oil painting that lay on the writing-table—a woman's portrait. He was by now keenly interested in his hermit-like host and, curiosity getting the better of him, he drew nearer to inspect the picture. It was the portrait of a half-grown girl with features so unusually clear and defined that they arrested the beholder like the mature, settled countenance of a very self-possessed woman.

He realized at once that this was a face he knew, but where, when and in what circumstances he had before felt the spell of that inexorable, resolute gaze, he was damned if he could recollect! Then suddenly the racing chariot of memory carried him back through a bewildering series of scenes and events, to deposit him with a jolt in the midst of a brilliantly lighted ballroom, where he danced at a wedding, and the bride's lovely face drew nearer and nearer in the changing figures of a quadrille. Recollection was instantaneous; something that had slept, formless, in his brain for years took on the clear contours, the warmth of a recent experience.

Maximilian was still standing before the picture lost in reverie, as Nolken hurried in through the garden door. The Baron had spent the morning impatiently cross-questioning Petja but had been able to get very little out of the fellow. What he had learned, however, had shaken him to the soul.

Since that eventful afternoon in Anna Kyrillovna's palace Nolken's whole life had centered in a single, precious memory. Under the debilitating, narcotic effects of solitude among his forests and costly curios, he had given himself to the thought of Olga. His agents kept him pretty fully informed of her fate up to the time of her marriage. After that he had given up. Existence ceased to have interest or value and he lost himself more and more in a deepening twilight. The young Austrian's visit roused him from this lethargy. A sudden ray of light, as pain-

ful as unexpected, woke his sleeping will and made him momentarily a man of action and purpose.

Thus a very different person from his host of the previous evening now faced Cortiselli, his eyes shining, his face animated, and overwhelmed him with questions and requests. The guest, as he listened, began to see clues which he might profitably have followed up many years before if he had ever thought about the matter. Cortiselli, in his more reflective moments, was often inclined to charge himself with frivolity and light-mindedness for making so little use of chance information that came his way. Now, however, in the excitement of a rapid conversation with Nolken which quickly set the two on an intimate and confidential footing, his first feeling was one of genuine, stinging remorse. A vague sense that he owed amends for some not very clearly defined fault gathered force from the other's intense emotion. Nolken's poor brain, roused from the drugged sleep of years, and Cortiselli's shallow heart, quickened by something like shock at the discovery of its own lukewarmness, prompted both men to vigorous, immediate action.

Nolken felt certain, with the painful certainty in such a matter of one who was himself a mental sufferer, that the child he had seen ought never to have suffered in that way—could not, indeed, have become really insane. Some terrible secret must lie at the back of that allegation.

They again questioned Petja exhaustively, and

under cross-examination he managed to recall all sorts of remarkable details of his service in Sergeyevsk.

When the two men left that same evening for St. Petersburg they felt pretty sure of their case.

A fortunate accident helped them. On arrival Nolken lost no time in calling upon Anna Kyrillovna, who at once remembered him as the young man she had arranged to banish from St. Petersburg. Nolken went straight to the point and asked the Princess about Olga. She was furious at his imputations. On these lines their interview was necessarily brief. Anna Kyrillovna made short work of her visitor and forced him to leave the house with an ironic comment or two on his evidently unaltered eccentricity of manner ringing in his ears.

Bitterly disappointed, Nolken's one idea was to hurry back to his hotel and take council with Cortiselli, and such was his confusion of mind that he dashed across the Millionnaya right under the wheels of a passing vehicle, fortunately without doing himself serious injury. The occupant of the carriage, a kindly old lady, stopped to ask if he were hurt and insisted on his calling on her later to tell her how he did. She was the Grand Duchess Maria Nicolaievna, sister of the late Czar.

On Cortiselli's advice Nolken seized his opportunity and frankly told the sister of Olga's exalted

god-father of the suspicions that had brought him to St. Petersburg. The result was that within a few weeks of their arrival in the capital more than one member of the Imperial family had heard the extraordinary story.

A few days later Anna Kyrillovna was astonished to find that that crazy young German's insolent visit had been merely the opening skirmish of a regular campaign. She found herself beset by inquiries and curious glances; even the Czar asked pressingly for news of her daughter's condition. At length, when her old and intimate friend the Procurator came to her with a grave face and reminded her of his former exhortations, she could not refrain from smiling a little at the old man's eager interest in the subject, yet she could no longer ignore the fact that here was a movement she was powerless to control. She quickly made up her mind how to act.

In the passing years she had become quite indifferent to her daughter's fate. It was just a little disturbing to think of her at all—an interruption of her various important and pious undertakings. For a moment the sight of Nolken had awaked the old jealous hatred. She telegraphed to Dmitri, determined to resist any interference. When, however, she saw that the time for this was past, she instantly changed her attitude. She herself advocated a fresh medical examination of her afflicted daughter, which was what all who heard the story were more urgently demanding day by day. It was by the Princess's re-

quest, therefore, that a small commission of dignitaries and medical men set out for Sergeyevsk, without awaiting Dmitri's return from Italy. Nolken pressed so urgently for a place on this commission that it could hardly be refused him, more especially since he had already bribed the other members to support him.

The commission pronounced Olga perfectly sane. The ensuing sensation spread the whole story far beyond the small circle of initiates to whom it had hitherto been restricted. An unknown young princess suddenly became the centre of a public interest that was manifested in several curious ways. A remarkable variety of persons and groups of persons awaited Olga's arrival in St. Petersburg with tense interest. Some saw an opportunity of making political capital out of so extraordinary an instance of mediæval tyranny. A lecturer in jurisprudence with liberal opinions referred to it publicly as a terrible example of the antiquated, feudal-patriarchal conditions obtaining in Russia, while revolutionary pamphlets spread the story of the secret oppression of a defenseless, even though aristocratic, woman as a useful piece of democratic propaganda.

If these people, however, had any hopes that their interest would be reciprocated by the eight and twenty year old martyr herself, they were doomed to speedy disappointment. Olga received the commission's visit with surprising calm and self-possession. The help from outside which, as she had told her-

self for years, was her only chance of rescue had come at last—as it seemed to her almost inevitably. The doctors found her a very silent woman, slovenly and uncared-for in appearance, but capable of entering into discussion of her affairs with the utmost clarity as soon as she learned why they had come. She recognized Baron Nolken and thanked him briefly when she heard of his efforts on her behalf. She then began at once to make plans for the future.

On the doctors' report an Imperial edict ordered the Princess's immediate and unqualified release, and invited her to plead her cause in person before the Czar as soon as her health permitted. Olga's first act, however, was to visit a small country estate in the Crimea, the property of the Grand Duchess Maria, in the company of Nolken and some physicians.

Meanwhile Dmitri had reached St. Petersburg to find his case hopelessly prejudiced in advance. It was with some difficulty indeed that he evaded a formal judicial inquiry into his own conduct in the affair. The Czar, as supreme head of the Church, was fundamentally opposed to divorce; yet the arguments on all hands for making an exception in this particular case were such that he could hardly refuse to listen to them. Dmitri was obliged to put his case into the hands of his lawyer and retire to one of his country estates much like an outlaw.

Vladimir's part in the proceedings at Sergeyevsk had also become notorious; and he too, on his arrival

in St. Petersburg some time after his brother, soon found it advisable to leave the city, though he stayed a little to see how matters developed.

Anna Kyrillovna wrote at once to Olga and invited her to stay with her. She did this out of policy, but she was also really curious to see what effect long years of imprisonment had had on her daughter. Olga, however, firmly declined the invitation and the Princess, feeling that public opinion was against her remaining in St. Petersburg, elected to go abroad before her daughter arrived in the capital.

Cortiselli's leave was nearly at an end and he returned to Madrid without seeing Olga again. Nolken sent him brief accounts of the subsequent proceedings; but the affair quickly ceased to occupy his attention and, indeed, almost faded from his not very retentive memory. In later years it meant no more to him than any one of a number of entertaining incidents, whose details grew dim with the passage of time.

When Olga herself arrived in St. Petersburg public expectation suffered a severe disappointment. The heroine of a most romantic story of captivity and rescue refused to appear outside the narrow circle of intimates who were engaged in settling her affairs. To the Grand Duchess, to Baron Nolken, and to the lawyers her attitude was from the first a surprise from which they found it difficult to recover. Quietly, with few words and with complete

self-confidence, she at once took her fate in her own hands.

She took an interest in each stage of the legal process, made suggestions, and showed a degree of vindictiveness that really distressed the kindly old Grand Duchess. She followed up each little advantage with fierce energy. Her criticisms of her husband and her mother had a ring of bitter hatred. The most charitable could not doubt that here was a woman full of malice and revenge. Nolken did not oppose her hardness and ruthlessness; he became the blind instrument of her every wish. But the Grand Duchess soon severed relations with her, now far from helpless, protégée.

Olga's audience with the Czar also failed to conform to programme. Here, too, she was blatantly self-reliant and frank. The Procurator, who was present, tried in vain to get her to modify her attitude, to *look,* at least, like a meek, martyred daughter of the church—a guise which would have been more acceptable to the Czar. The divorce was indeed promulgated shortly afterwards, but the Czar's indignation at the arrogant bearing of the recipient of his royal grace dispelled the last remnants of sympathy with her at court.

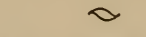
Olga herself was quietly satisfied. She felt she had entered the city like a victorious conqueror. This, to her, was fulfilment: she had now forced her way into the world of power, of success, of tyranny, from which everything hitherto had conspired to ex-

clude her. She looked at people and things with the calculated indifference and cold curiosity of the cynic whom nothing can surprise. This was the real beginning of her life. She was determined to make the most of it—on how many thousand barren days had she not sworn it, again and again! In how many thousand nights had she not dreamed her terrible dream of limitless power, which she felt from hour to hour growing within her. No momentary weakness, no enervating emotion, no foolish indecision, should ever again shake her security or cripple her imperious will to play a bold, energetic and evil game with the human puppets of the world.

Baron Nolken received a series of shocks too severe to be long endured by so weak a nature. He had been roused from lethargy, had pulled himself together, had willed, planned and loved. For a time these things made almost a sane and healthy man of him. But when his pliant, yielding disposition felt the impact of Olga's harshness, his relapse was so much the greater. He put up no fight and would most likely have slipped once for all into chronic invalidism if Olga had not firmly and ruthlessly taken his life into her hands.

He was the first person she encountered in her new existence; he became the first victim of her new implacable vitality. There was something horrible in the way these utterly different natures supple-

mented each other. Nolken only asked to lose himself in total surrender, his weak, submissive temperament finding expression in the single passion of renunciation. The woman, on the contrary, was thirsty for the blood and souls of men, hungry to see them lie helpless under her feet, without ever surrendering the least particle of herself. This intense reaction, this morbid exclusive idea of enjoyment and power, like everything else in Olga's life, had grown up entirely within herself, out of the narrow confines of her undisciplined, greedy brain and not from any knowledge and experience of the real world. At the same time Baron Nolken's devotion to her almost amounted to religious awe and strengthened her in a pride at times not far removed from mania.



As Olga moved to and fro in Nolken's little palace, received visitors and issued orders, a pair of dull, lightless, greedily submissive eyes continually followed her every movement. At least ten times a day Herr Pupill bowed low before her—Constantine Feodorovitch Pupill, steward of Baron Nolken's house in St. Petersburg. Olga never noticed his insignificant, pimply face, till one day a curious occurrence aroused her attention.

Many years before, as a young man, Pupill had become involved with the Revolutionary Party. As a shabby, little Lettish clerk, serving with a heart full of concealed bitterness, fashionable ladies and gen-

tlemen in the shops on the Sadovaya, he had found great comfort and support in the high-sounding, resonant phrases of their "Manifestoes to the People." Later he had speculated in a small way, for a time with success, till he became involved in a shady bankruptcy which practically ruined him. It was at this juncture that Baron Nolken, in his total ignorance of men, took him up; and the fellow's cunning eventually advanced him to a post of some importance in the Baron's service. He would have been only too glad to renounce his connection with the anarchical element for ever, were it not for his dread of some terrible terrorist vengeance. Most unwillingly, therefore, he remained in secret touch with the party, occasionally hid fugitives in his master's house, and sweated, after each fresh anarchist outrage, in mortal fear of discovery.

During the years of Olga's imprisonment great changes had come about in Russian revolutionary policy. Individual terrorist action, directed for decades against the Crown and the police, gradually gave place to mass propaganda for social revolution in industrial centres. Supporters of direct action steadily lost importance. The anarchist societies were torn by dogmatic disputes and undermined by spies and traitors. Many owed continued existence to the toleration of ambitious police officers who assiduously cultivated "hotbeds of revolutionary activity" in the interest of their careers, labelling their carefully tended specimens with the terrifying

names of "Nihilism," "Anarchism," and "Assassination."

The members of these societies were mainly oddities of various kinds, bigoted idealists, outcast adventurers from the ranks of the ruling classes who, feeling that theirs was a forlorn hope and knowing their day was over, could yet find no place in the tough and patient ranks of the industrial proletariat. Their enterprises were mere desperate imitations of the doings of the earlier terrorists. In addition to the old-fashioned methods, which they still prosecuted zealously, was that of forming a connection with highly placed persons, "without which successful terrorist activities are impossible." Strangely, a taste for entering into such "protective" relations with revolutionary forces increased in the ruling classes, as the real importance of Terrorism declined. An atmosphere of weariness, a presentiment of a general catastrophe, gained ground at the close of the century, causing the nobility, and even the rising bourgeoisie, to regard these isolated survivals of an heroic age as the true champions of revolution, while they were willfully blind to the growing agitation among the industrial workers.

Pupill was under orders from a group calling itself "Land and Freedom," which great historic name concealed several wretched little private revolutionary undertakings. The real leader of this group was I. P. Golenishtsheff, president in 1881 of the Penza committee of the *Naradnaya Volya*. Jevgeni

Dolichin, though he had had to flee the country some years previously, also maintained a loose connection with this organization.

When the remarkable case of Princess Boryshkin was brought to the notice of the central committee, Pupill became an instrument of some importance. Golenishtsheff, absurdly overestimating the little steward's capacities, charged him with tasks which might well have been the downfall of a calmer and more courageous man. The group leader dreamed of winning the injured lady to the revolutionary cause. Pupill was ordered to find opportunities of talking to her and of insinuating, or fostering, certain revolutionary views.

It was rather like setting a very small fox on a tigress. Olga treated the man, as she treated all inferiors, with great harshness. She began to notice, however, with some surprise, that Pupill nowadays was continually at her heels, that he plagued her with silly questions and was always pushing himself forward. When she turned on him, he assured her cringingly of his boundless devotion, and begged with a dog-like expression for something—what, she could not guess. Pupill, indeed, was in despair. All his little manœuvers had been fruitless, yet he must have some result to show. In his distress he hit upon the idiotic plan of searching Olga's papers, hoping to discover some valuable secret. He carried out this project so clumsily that he was caught by Olga herself at the very first attempt.

Late one evening she was surprised to see a light in her study, and entering found Pupill, paralyzed with terror, crouched over her desk. She went resolutely at him, seized him by the shoulders, shook him fiercely and threatened to send for the police. Pupill broke down completely. He saw himself already in a Siberian fortress, threw up the game, fell upon his knees before her and howled for mercy. Finally, seeing no other way out, he made a full and circumstantial confession. Olga's ideas of revolutionary aims and methods were necessarily scanty and vague, derived in part from recollections of Dolichin's talk and in part from chance remarks heard since. But she divined a dangerous force, to which she felt attracted.

As the snivelling wretch before her blurted out all his scanty knowledge of these matters, she realized that here was a game well worth playing for the excitement it offered. She was getting bored by Nolken's meek devotion, her law case was ended and she had nothing to engage her interest. This miserable wretch, caught in his own snare, whining something about "forty years without a stain on his character," was exactly the sort of dirty, ignoble specimen of humanity that accorded with her preconceived ideas of the breed. She actually felt for the fellow something of the hunter's affection for his prey as she saw him helpless in her power. Well, Pupill should know soon enough into what sort of hands he had fallen.

Vladimir Boryshkin was an embittered spectator of Olga's triumph. He could not take part in the conflict without undue risk. Indeed, he could only be glad that his submissive brother consented to shoulder all the guilty responsibility himself. But it maddened him to think that he had held the victim in his hand for years, yet had not possessed her—that he had actually allowed her to escape. What a fool he had been to think the woman had been broken, robbed of will and courage! What pleasures he had let slip! He stayed on in St. Petersburg, doing nothing. People looked askance at the discharged diplomat. His hot, evil blood stirred at the thought that his escaped prey was near, yet how inaccessible!

At last he could master his desires no longer. He must see her, even at the cost of humiliation. He made a few discreet, almost timid, attempts to get in touch with her. As Olga lived a very retired life and knew few people the task was not easy. After careful consideration he decided to assume the tedious and arduous rôle of languishing wooer. He hung about her house, bribed servants and maids, but only got an occasional distant glimpse of her. Eventually, however, he got a letter into her hands, full of abusive scorn of his brother, an odd medley of remorse and desire, cynical frankness and offers of devoted service.

Olga was not deceived for a moment as to the real significance of this *billet d'amour*. She had for-

gotten nothing—not one of those days of endless torment, not a single humiliation, not a single pang. And she meant to exact payment for all. She had waited for this man and his brother to cross her path again, and was well pleased to find him venturing himself voluntarily into her neighborhood so soon. She lived surrounded by weaklings; here was a foeman worthy of her steel! Very deliberately she set to work on plans to annihilate him.

After his confession Pupill had not been allowed a single private word with his mistress. Now he was ordered to inform his mysterious superior that his persuasive powers had won over the Princess. Further, Olga demanded to be brought into personal touch with Golenishtsheff himself. One night, with many precautions, he was smuggled into Baron Nolken's palace.

Golenishtsheff was a philosophical theorist, a dabbler in chemistry, a manufacturer of bombs and explosives. For the new materialistic philosophy of the modern revolutionary he had nothing but scorn. He would not see that his following was largely made up of spies and thieves, and he still luxuriated in wonderful dreams of ideal magnanimity and heroic self-sacrifice. The adherence to his party of an unfortunate and highly placed personage like the Princess Olga seemed to him a notable triumph. Olga, for her part, had been prepared to buy him once for all with a large sum of money down, but the flood of high-sounding phrases with which he

met her, warned her to go more cautiously to work. She listened to his enthusiastic outpourings with assumed interest until she discovered his vulnerable point. Golenishtsheff thirsted for fame—the immortal fame of public martyrdom for the revolutionary cause. It was his dream to do and to die as the worthy successor of Sheliabov and Sofia Perovskaya. The petty blackmailing affairs by which his followers had for years raised the necessary funds for propaganda and explosives, left him unsatisfied. Olga easily convinced him of the advantage of becoming independent of these minor activities in the interests of major schemes. She also promised him important information. Eventually, after much eyewash negotiation, the revolutionary consented to accept (with safeguarding clauses) her offer of regular financial support.

To the astonishment of the police the depredations of "Group G." suddenly ceased. As, however, no one but the leader knew the reason for this change, it never came out that for a time Olga Borisovna had bought this group of terrorists, much as she might have bought a troop of *condottieri* had she lived in Renaissance days.

After a decent interval Olga drew Golenishtsheff's attention to Prince Vladimir Boryshkin. The man was, it was true, momentarily out of official favor, but he was still actively interested in the "Black Hundred" and was still in popular disrepute for the part he had played in her private misfor-

tunes. This was surely a propitious moment for an attempt on his life; moreover such an attempt would re-direct the attention of the nation to the now half-forgotten terrorist movement. Olga had not reckoned falsely. Golenishtsheff was simple enough to be caught by this childish line of argument. He fell in with her plan and proposed to do the deed himself with the aid of one accomplice.

Vladimir, meanwhile, continued to send Olga flowers and letters. At last he seemed to win a response. A cryptic note, in which Olga's name was not actually mentioned, bade him to a secret midnight rendezvous.

The place appointed was a lonely spot on the Neva embankment. There he paced impatiently up and down two or three times, when suddenly two men leapt over the stone balustrade and attacked him with knives and cudgels. Vladimir was a far stronger man than either of his assailants. After his first surprise he soon got the upper hand. Seizing one by the throat, he dashed his head against the quay-side and threw the unconscious man into the river. The other, Golenishtsheff himself, took to flight, firing a couple of shots as he ran. Vladimir was not hit but he soon lost sight of his quarry in the darkness.

Vladimir left the riverside in thoughtful mood. The more he reflected on the adventure the more pleased he felt. His first idea had been to summon the nearest policeman. But he wanted to insure that

the upshot should deliver Olga wholly into his hands. There could be no doubt that she had instigated the attack. Eagerness for the sequel kept him awake for the rest of the night, and early next morning he drove to visit his ex-sister-in-law.

Olga knew already that the attempt had failed. Golenishtsheff came to her very early, in desperate mood, and swore that within the next few days he would successfully bring off a better-planned attempt. He was still talking to her when Vladimir was announced. Olga thought rapidly. She asked her accomplice for a life-and-death oath of silence, come what would. In the heat of the moment she found the very phrases, high-sounding and reason-drugging, to capture Golenishtsheff's excited imagination. When he left her she felt she could rely upon him completely.

She received Vladimir with an icy coldness, a deliberately insulting manner. She expressed surprise at his visit. She ignored his reference to the letters and flowers she had received from him, and behaved as if she supposed he must have come about some belated business in connection with the divorce suit. Such complete self-possession made Vladimir uneasy in spite of himself. Yet at the same time his pleasure increased in this bitter, unbending woman. Those proud shoulders, he thought, had cowered helplessly for years, locked into a room in one of his houses. Those pitiless eyes that he had once made blank and sad—how had they acquired their present bril-

liance? A wild desperate desire to possess her rose in his throat, making his voice rough and menacing. At last throwing self-control to the winds, he hurled wild accusations at her. For a moment she shrank from him, then, without answering a word, she rang for the servants. Vladimir advanced threateningly upon her. She raised a warning hand, but she would not even look at him. He had barely time to shout that he gave her twenty-four hours to change her mind when he was forced out of the house.

Hardly was he gone when Olga sent for Pupill. The steward had no knowledge of his mistress's undertakings. Now, as formerly, she gave him no confidence and treated him as she treated the rest of her numerous servants. He found, however, that he was no longer plagued by orders from the revolutionaries, and his natural uppishness had accordingly revived. His surprise and horror at the task now laid upon him were the more crushing. He twisted and wriggled in the trap, as before he whined, fell on his knees and kissed Olga's feet. But it was no use. He realized now that he had been spared all this time simply to fulfil a terrible command that might cost him his neck. There was no way of escape. Wringing his hands, and almost dead from fright, he finally left. Desperately he turned the matter over in his mind. Should he make another confession—this time to Golenishtsheff? But that would mean fleeing the house and putting himself wholly in the power of the terrible man he had begun

to forget. It would be better to obey Olga. After all, all might be well!

He set about his task, often interrupted by fits of terrified weeping. With Olga's recommendation to back him he obtained a passport for foreign travel. He bought his ticket, packed his bags, and went to the railway-station. There he sat down and wrote a short note in disguised handwriting. An hour before the departure of the Riga express he dragged himself trembling to the police-station nearest to Golenishtsheff's lodging, handed in the letter and hurried away. He did not breathe freely till the train was out of the station.

Next morning Vladimir Boryshkin sat at breakfast in a happy frame of mind. To-day, he thought, he would humble that woman to the dust. His man came in with his letters and newspapers. On the front page of *Rossija* a headline announced the arrest of a dangerous terrorist leader. Underneath were sub-headlines: BODY OF ONE OF THE VICTIMS WASHED ASHORE NEAR ARSENAL—ASSASSIN'S FULL CONFESSION.

Vladimir tore the paper across and flung it in the valet's face. Then, dressing in furious haste, he hurried into the city. The police officers to whom he applied looked at the excited man with mingled surprise and suspicion. After hours of waiting he was admitted to the presence of the chief of the Investigation Department, and even this favor was not easily granted him. That morning Vladimir real-

ized what it was to be known to have fallen from favor.

However, he was allowed to state his case. His fantastic story was received by the authorities with incredulous head-shakings; doubt of his truthfulness was written on every face. He persuaded them eventually to confront him with the prisoner; but he could not instantaneously recognize Golenishtsheff as his nocturnal assailant; and his momentary indecision impressed the officials, who scrutinized him more closely than they did the prisoner. They hardly appeared to need the prisoner's affirmation, made in a resolute voice, that he had never seen the gentleman before in his life. Golenishtsheff was then led back to his cell. The lesser officials also withdrew, leaving Vladimir alone with the chief. The latter motioned him to a chair with a somewhat contemptuous gesture. When he began to speak his voice was cutting and he scarcely veiled his satisfaction at having a chance of dressing down a man of rank and distinction.

He supposed, he said, that he must attribute this extraordinary slander to a momentary aberration of His Excellency. Otherwise, in view of the Prince's known part in his sister-in-law's strange case, the police could hardly do less than issue a warrant for his arrest. He would, furthermore, inform him—though strictly it was not his official duty to do so—that the arrest of Golenishtsheff, which there had just been such a disgusting—yes, *disgusting*—at-

tempt to exploit, had been caused by an anonymous denunciation proceeding from some revolutionary black-leg. Very well. That, then, would be all. Good morning!

A few days later Vladimir left St. Petersburg.

Time passed and Nolken still lived in close association with Olga. After a brief period of happy excitement, he daily sank deeper into his old supine, dreamy state. His hours were empty, dreary, purposeless. He felt dully that the woman he loved was slipping further and further from him, and with her went what feeble strength and desire bound him to life. A word, a mere indifferent gesture from Olga, renewed his slavery; yet such brief moments of joy gave a soul, fainting under a burden of unspoken love and sorrow, only further torments of uncertainty. If he had been without hope, if he had known himself condemned irretrievably to do without that which he longed for, his life might have run quietly and obscurely to its close, purposeless but safe. Living as he did, however, at the side of a being compact of terrific will-power, he was thrown again and again into distracting doubts and dilemmas.

That she should at her pleasure dispose of himself and his household seemed to him natural. But at times he felt afraid of her. Ruthlessness triumphant shone like lightning from her eyes—the ruthlessness of that cruel world of action from which,

even when a mere boy, Nolken had fled for refuge to a magic dreamland. He guessed that much went on around him of which he was purposely kept in the dark. Once or twice he hinted distantly and hesitatingly at marriage, but got no answer of any kind.

The chief of police who received Vladimir was something of a gossip, and rumor quickly spread accounts of the monstrous and absurd slander of which Olga had been the victim. The story reached Nolken's ears. He had sensed for some days a restlessness in Olga. Taking his courage in both hands, he respectfully repeated his former offers.

To his indescribable joy this time Olga heard him calmly. She bent her cool gaze upon him, she even put her small chill hand over his. She told him that she would do as he wished. They would celebrate their engagement very quietly and then go away at once. The marriage would take place somewhere abroad, far away from St. Petersburg. Nolken stretched out his arms. Sudden, perfect bliss deprived him of speech.

He took endless pains in preparing for the journey. Special private coaches were to be put on their train at all junctions; suites of rooms decked with flowers were to await the pair in their hotels.

On the evening before their departure a few announcements of the engagement were sent out. Olga addressed three with her own hand, two to the brothers Boryshkin, and one to the Princess Anna Kyrillovna, Sheppard's Hotel, Cairo.

CHAPTER VIII

A LONG, monotonous drone. A sulphurous smell. Sickly fumes and stuffy warmth. Olga opened her heavy eyelids upon what looked like a white, gently heaving landscape. Her head lay as if imbedded in a narrow valley, while huge crevassed glaciers seemed to flow down towards her eyes. An unsteady light, and a noise, a jolting, grinding, rumbling, endless noise, almost deafened her with its continuous roar. With a shock of full awakening she lifted her head from the pillow.

She was alone, at night, in a *wagon-lit* on the Riviera express. The red flame of the petroleum lamp flickered wildly. On the yellow carpet, a silly pattern, half fish, half lily, repeated itself in maddening uniformity till lost in the shadowy corners.

Olga pressed her hand hard against her temples and vigorously stroked her smooth hair backwards a dozen times or so, till her head, humming from the noise and rattle of the train, became sensibly relieved. Then she let herself sink back slowly. Her eyes were wide open now. That sulphurous smell. Sickly fumes and stuffy warmth. Jolting, grinding, rumbling noises.

Olga lay musing. For three, for four, for six

months they had been travelling. Everywhere those dirty glass station roofs—everywhere thickly carpeted hotel lounges, classic columns at entrances to museums, theatres, parliaments, picture-galleries, churches. Everywhere two shining buttons on the bowed backs of hotel flunkeys; everywhere hotel waiters with fluttering napkins, whisked at just the same angle. Pupill's dirty-looking skin against the glossy leather of portmanteaus; Pupill's short, stupid neck bent over fires that would not light; Pupill's imperious little hand beckoning to cabmen; and Pupill's thick, croaking voice hushed in obsequious devotion.—And then Nolken's gentle drawl—that, too, lowered in obsequious devotion. Nolken's caressing hands, Nolken's gaze attending her every want; Nolken's eyes, wide-opened with dismay at her invariable coldness. Nolken's frank round face—suddenly so close to hers, questioning, urgent as never before—this very day—this very evening—in June—in the Riviera express—in this very railway coach! Why, he was asleep now, only a few yards away from her! Or perhaps he was not asleep. Could one sleep after saying a thing like that? *Ah, that was it!* They had just finished dinner when suddenly he had begun to talk, hesitatingly at first, then increasingly loud and fast, as if he were afraid of being interrupted—faster and faster. It was the first time for months that he had spoken so excitedly. *What had he said?*

Olga sat bolt upright, wide awake at last. She

remembered everything. Those desperate, determined words seemed not to come from that soft, still half-childish mouth—or rather it was as if some other spoke through him. His face was suffused and quivering with the stream of words as if with disease. A glance at that face and suddenly she understood. He had really come to the end—to *his* end. He was done—he would go out like a candle. And he knew it. That was what he had just told her. He could bear the strain of his useless existence no longer. The incalculable chances, the ups and downs of living, had lost point for him. In all this he said nothing of her. But Olga knew of course that it all turned on her. It was her indifference that he could bear no longer. It was the strain of living near and having no share in her that was unendurable. His lips had uttered small, misleading truths, but his burning eyes had betrayed him. For the first time Olga was shocked at the inexorable quality of her power. She had had no desire to hurt this man. She felt something like lukewarm gratitude towards him, certainly no malice. He did not get in her way—then why could he not go on living in peace? But he had told her that he no longer cared to live. To-morrow—or in a month's time—he would kill himself. He simply wanted to let her know. Hours afterwards Olga wondered if it had not been a kind of request for her permission! Well, she might have refused it. She might have forbidden him ever to think of it. But she had said noth-

ing. Not for an instant had she doubted that he was in earnest, yet she had said nothing. She had given him her hand to kiss and gone to her own compartment.

It was night now—her watch said half-past three—and she had waked with this sense of something wrong. Second by second the great train forged on through the darkness—five metres a second—or was it ten?—it did not matter. It went on anyway, carrying her with it. One could stop it of course. One could stop Nolken. One could even stop oneself. There were always such endless possibilities. Sometimes she wanted to reckon them all up clearly, but she never got very far with them. Yet she ended each of her days with a period of deliberate meditation. She was not in the least afraid of herself. She knew that she was as ignorant as a five-year-old child of the hurrying, bustling life about her. She had a vague, oppressive idea of her limitations. And yet it was just this blind ignorance that she believed in and trusted. It gave her a sleep-walker's security; but, like a sleep-walker, it must not be touched.

Among the multitude of things she did not know she moved unerringly towards a goal she cared as little to know. Whence she came and whither she was being driven were none the less questions that occupied her often. There was a sinister charm in worrying over these things, in exciting oneself about them, in despairing of a solution. There *was*, of course, no answer. Still all the thousands and mil-

lions, and thousands of millions, in the world do nothing else. That was why there were states, and philosophies, and religion, and trouble of all kinds—revolutions, wars, love in its hundred forms. She knew of all these things, of course. But she could not find them within herself. They were external to herself—words written by an unknown teacher upon an invisible blackboard—a lesson to be learned—a book to be read—a spectacle to be looked at. One understood it all but it did not concern one for a moment.

What did concern her? Where did the law, the sure basis of her being, really lie? It might help, perhaps, to think back into her past, to track down the moment of her self's awakening. Had that been behind the four-colored façade of the palace in the Millionnaya? Or in the long, low house at Ligovo? No, it had been in that awful, solitary, deathly room at Sergeyevsk. A secret, mounting wave of boundless power and confidence had risen year by year higher and stronger in her breast. Then, on a certain day, all the past had been obliterated, swept away forever by that wave. What kind of day had it been? A day like three thousand others—no difference at all. All the morning she had paced aimlessly up and down as usual. The light through the window panes was dull and grey. At noon the maid came with soup. Cabbage floated in the basin and little pieces of fat—eyes of fat greedily mirroring her haggard face.

Then night wrapped its harsh veil about her loneliness. She sat at the window staring hour after hour at new, changing, monstrous pictures of future strength and power.

What comfort, what security she had enjoyed in those nights! A few years before she lay helpless and defenceless by the soft, quivering body of that weakling, Dmitri, who struck her because he feared her. There had been one dreadful morning in the station square at Tula. Three times, no, four times one of those young revolutionaries had reared convulsively in his noose, his head hidden in the sack—he would *not* hang quiet and still in death. A tearing pang shot through her own body—it was contorted, as the terrible limbs of the hanged man were contorted. It was as though she were being sawn asunder. She lay in the hospital at Tula. If only he would have hung quietly!—Then perhaps her son would have lived—a little Vladimir, pinching the maids' cheeks and laying about the men with his riding whip—for any child of Dmitri would somehow have been a child of Vladimir. How near Vladimir had been to her, when his hard, strong-smelling body had pressed down on her, when he and his three servants had forced her into a corner and bound her hands and feet fast with cords! She thought he had actually trodden on her then—put his foot on her. She was glad he was still alive—glad that that foot was not rotting in Neva water. That still was in prospect for him; she would have

it to gloat over for years to come. Once more she could evoke that helpless longing in his eyes, as on that morning in St. Petersburg when he came, intending to browbeat and intimidate her. Once more she could again rejoice at the expression of desirous hate on his thick, uncontrolled lips—those lips that would never reach the hand whither they so irresistibly pressed.

Ah, but why was he so drawn? Could the man not sense destruction to himself in every movement of her body—once humiliated, once slain, but now risen from the dead? What was it men asked of her? What was the meaning of those hot glances, those clenched hands—in hotel lounges, on promenades, in corridors of *wagons-lits?* It was that which clinched her power—which gave Vladimir, while hating her, into her clutches. Olga knew what it was, of course. It was love, desire, liking, longing, sexuality, lust, the urge to possess, passion, appetite —the thing had a hundred names. There was a lot about it in books. All men love—so said biographies, foreign grammars, Bibles and French novels. Olga liked to read of Queen Elizabeth, Dido, Semiramis and Catherine. She devoured Napoleon's letters. But when love was mentioned, she smiled. She knew better! This love was nothing more than an extraordinarily cunning lie. There was no such thing. She had never felt a trace of it. Never. Neither, she was sure, had other great men and women. But if it were true that they had ever suc-

cumbed to this influence, she would not hesitate to rank herself above them in essential power and independence. For the moment, however, her megalomania had no need to go as far as that. This ridiculous thing called passion was assuredly an invention. People had invented it for the same reason that they had invented God, the State, goodness, tenderness—all ministrants to a grandiose system. A very simple system, too! But Olga had seen through it once for all and determined to use it autocratically for her own ends. She worked it out somewhat as follows:

The great teeming masses of mankind live their lives in subjection, in obedience, in mental inertia, in wage-slavery. Paid servants, paid teachers, paid revolutionaries. Strange that these creatures breathed and spoke like men! That made for the greatest convenience but was also somewhat dangerous. For above this nearly featureless herd were a minority who *knew*—men and women who out of sheer joy in existence fought for rule, for power. These elect ones had an awful task. In all seriousness Olga felt that she had a terrible duty: to be relentless. She must render account to herself alone. She must suffer no god near her. There must be no limit to her devotion to herself—she must worship herself with unswerving, unresting passion. Day and night she felt the irresistible thrust of this duty. Each evening she meditated thereon, clearly and fearlessly, till full illumination came. Where-

upon she fell into a dreamless sleep of perfect contentment.

Why, then, had she waked to-night? Because poor little Nolken meant to take his own life? Because, slave that he was, he could no longer bear the strain of his miserable existence? Why should this trouble her? She would never sink beneath the burden of being. Besides she was only at the beginning. Sometimes she felt impatient. Where was her battlefield, she asked, where her enemy? In every fibre of her body, in her secret consciousness, she knew she had no taint of desire for human nearness, for kindness, for the foolish assurances of flattery, for the idiotic contact of caressing arms. The spears of men's glances must for ever splinter against the armor of her pride, their imperious desires must change to humble petitions made to one of supreme dominion. As life went on everything, everything should confirm her unassailable omnipotence.

But this omnipotence was vacuous, it did not make her happy, it did not bring fame, it was a heavy burden, a galling yoke. Olga thirsted for violent opposition, for battle, for risk and danger. She exhausted herself in fruitless introspection. Unchallenged might becomes insipid. And who would dare to challenge her? Not Nolken, certainly. And Vladimir had fled to his fastnesses. When could she put her strength to the proof? Must she wait again on exterior chance? Was she just as truly a prisoner in the stronghold of her own power as she had been

in the narrow cell of a secluded country house? Was unlimited strength after all so weak that it could not wound itself? Whence came this torturing sense of something lacking? Whither was it carrying her? Olga could find no answer.

The few simple ideas that had gone to form Olga's character stand out quite clearly against the background of her years. She now made her way through life with the comparative security, and the paucity of sense-impressions, of one who, on a fog-bound winter night, gropes along his path by the reflected light of the snow, but has no conception of what the surrounding landscape may be like under the bright light of a summer's day.

Jolting, grinding noises. A sulphurous smell. Stuffy warmth. Her glacier pillow-landscape seemed to tower mountainously about her head. She lay swollen with pride in her isolation and her imperative will. She was drunk with egotism. Hers was the fanatic mind-drugging cult of the one, cold, self-adoring, jealous Godhead of the world—of isolated Being, without love, without desire, without wonder, without sorrow. Olga was greater than Napoleon and more forlorn than Dido. She walked unfalteringly through the fabulous maze of existence—that brilliant carpet, woven of the cramped lives and crippled bodies of millions—that perilously rocking pleasance, more lovely far than the hanging gardens of Semiramis. Her soul moved unshackled by barriers of Time, Space, or Fate—illusions, all, those

high-sounding names! Why, the whole universe reeled beneath her, jolting and shaking! She herself was Power, she herself was Life, the meaning of all that happened, the Beginning and the Way. And if she were never to find the Great Enemy, the Gainsayer, she would also be her own End. Would the strength in her ever find its object? Would her scattered concepts ever unite in the perfect circle? She did not know. She doubted if she cared. She had thought enough for to-day. Enough—an end —enough—someday—enough—forever and ever enough. And—enough-enough, enough-enough, enough-enough, chaffed the great train, speeding tirelessly southwards. Black, dreamless sleep.

Vladimir went to join Dmitri at Sergeyevsk. He found a sinister satisfaction in abusing and reviling his miserable brother. Dmitri was a dog who had refused to show fight. He had let the quarry slip from between his very teeth. Teeth, forsooth! Pah, miserable little cat's claws—weak, soft, futile hands that had lost hold on the loveliest piece of woman-flesh on earth! Dmitri dared not remind his brother that it was *his* plans that had been carried out. Indeed, he had almost forgotten it. He felt that the weight of guilt rested on his shoulders alone. He let his brother goad him into ever blacker depths of remorse and baffled desire. Vladimir hoped, perhaps, to drive him to some desperate act, such as a

mad attack on Olga's life. But Dmitri characteristically abandoned himself to senseless fits of rage. He locked young peasant girls into the room that had once been his wife's, beat them with switch and *nagaika,* and then, having begged forgiveness and overloaded them with presents, fell upon and beat them again. He was alternately a raging tyrant and a cringing suppliant. In neither character did he find peace. His brain gave way rapidly, as if from some malignant disease. He rode horses to death, flogged overseers and servants so that they absconded by dozens, drank himself insensible, howled for days together in accesses of hideous remorse, and grovelled before his brother till even he became sick with disgust and left Sergeyevsk to settle on his estate at Bogorodsk, near Tula. Soon afterwards he was delighted to hear that Dmitri was travelling in western Europe. For days and weeks he waited in pleased anticipation for news of a certain event. But that news never came.

Dmitri did indeed follow Olga, but by stealth. He sought out all the places where she had stayed with Nolken and asked the hotel proprietors to give him her bedroom. Installed there he crawled and rolled like a lunatic beneath the bed, tore the bedclothes or spent the night on his knees before some tumbler out of which he imagined she had drunk. He was soon known along the Mediterranean coast as the mad Russian who hired rooms for lonely orgies. A troop of servants travelled with him. He

was served with all sorts of fantastic foods on silver dishes—ragouts of larks' tongues, African turtles cooked in Château d'Yquem, iced artichokes and asparagus tips. Sometimes he would sniff at the dishes, sit staring motionless at them for a long time, then spit into them, kick them off the table with his foot and smear them about the floor. Meanwhile his valet read aloud to him from Huysmans, or the Marquis de Sade's *Justine* in a gold-stamped morocco-bound volume which was sometimes hurled at the reader's head. Four girls from a Parisian vaudeville theatre hung round the room in rings and trapezes like parrots. They were wonderfully trained circus athletes. As they tumbled and whirled before him in their tights he felt the draft of their movements on his face. When in a good humor he fed them with candied Marechal Niel roses, for which they snapped like hungry birds. Later other girls would be brought in. Dmitri supported a whole troop of *cocottes* whom he hired for fixed sums to put up with his blows (at so much a buffet) and certain other humiliations. One, Mademoiselle Alma, a fat phlegmatic girl from Lorraine, set her teeth resolutely and in a few weeks amassed a fortune whose proceeds, in the days of the inflation in Germany twenty-five years later, were to make her owner of no less than eight houses in Berlin.

After a few months of this life Dmitri began to fail physically. He lost interest in everything, dismissed his servants and his women. His sole re-

maining companion was an astute, Serbian doctor who gave his patient a taste for hashish and opium. Dope dealers followed their important customer all over Europe. Unluckily for them his fits of raving madness increased in frequency and finally attracted so much public attention that the biggest bribes could no longer stave off the evil day of restraint. At last a resolute Swiss official got him certificated and shut up out of hand. In the bare, cool sanatorium Dmitri raved in despair. He ordered all the attendants to be hanged forthwith. He rushed upon the doctor and tried to strangle him. Then suddenly he collapsed like a guttering candle. He cried like a child and his physical habits became those of a new-born infant. He took to cramming his fingers into his mouth and at last choked to death in an hour-long fit, his face pressed into his pillows.

An account of his last days went by some oversight to Olga Borisovna, who at once sent the astonished doctor a cheque for fifty thousand francs.

Olga and Baron Nolken arrived late one evening in Munich. A table was laid for them in a small private room of the Hotel Vier Jahreszeiten. Pupill superintended the serving of the meal. Apart from his whispered instructions not a word was spoken in the room. Looking up covertly from her plate, Olga watched Nolken slowly eating. He had changed very much recently. His round face, for-

merly rather vacant, now betokened some secret unrest. It had become a wrinkled mask, through which his eyes gazed as from far away.

It was strange how much he occupied Olga's thoughts. Since their nocturnal talk weeks before in the *wagon-lit* they had not exchanged a word beyond the necessary daily commonplaces. Yet ever since that announcement of his intended suicide Olga had daily to be prepared for the event. It was uncanny to wait without a guess as to when or how it would occur. Sometimes it seemed to her that Nolken's lips were touched with a faint ironic smile not in keeping with him. Olga had to admit, much against her will, that she was getting more and more preoccupied with him.

In the simple and grandiose scheme of life which she had based on her own strength there was no room, she felt, for the thought of death. But apparently it did not trouble this meek, considerate man, hitherto the devoted slave of all her wishes. He was coming near to shattering her absolute self-confidence. At times, though, now, he showed his longing for rest. He would even ask if she would not like to stay a few days in whatever town they happened to have reached—if she were not tired of perpetual travelling. Olga had a distinct foreboding that if she did as he suggested his fatal purpose would at once be fulfilled. Again and again she tried to read something definite in that hourly fading face. But it was useless. At meal times, particularly, she

could not keep her eyes away from him. It was so strange to see those withered hands calmly take up knife and fork and convey food to a mouth, already almost as mute as death, strangely remote even now from such a vital activity as eating.

That evening, she thought there really was something significant in the way the corner of his mouth twitched; surely it meant that the moment of decision was near. Yet similar speculations during the last few weeks had been mistakes. As she gazed at him, trying to read his face, he suddenly looked straight at her. His eyes were empty and vacant and seemed to pass through without seeing her. A tinkling sound made her start. He had dropped his glass of red wine. His hand shook violently, but he did not turn his eyes away from her. A waiter quickly mopped up the wine-stains, but Nolken did not appear to notice. After a while he felt about vaguely for his glass, could not find it and ordered another bottle of wine.

A clear voice suddenly cut in, contradicting him; no, it said, it would not be good for the *Herr.* Nolken scarcely showed surprise. He merely enquired in a low voice why the other thought so. The waiter repeated that it would do the *Herr* no good. He spoke firmly, not very loud, but confidently, as if in social argument. *Like an equal,* thought Olga, suddenly furious.

She saw two large, calm eyes fixed on her, while the lips below them continued to talk with Nolken.

Olga realized at once that she had met that penetrating, questioning look somewhere before. She was still searching her memory when Pupill came bustling up and angrily scolded the waiter for daring to forget himself in this way; both then left the dining-room.

A few moments later, however, the strange waiter reappeared in the doorway and signalled to Olga. She saw the gesture, though she tried in vain to look as if she did not. She had interpreted it perfectly. As she left the dining-room her hand closed over a little note he had hidden behind the portière.

Nolken accompanied her to her own room. She wanted quiet in which to think, and therefore gave him only part of her usual attention. He sank into an easy chair, rested his chin in his hands and looked long at her. Olga was worried. The thought of asking his advice actually flashed into her mind, but at that moment he rose, kissed her hand and bade her good-night. At the door, however, he turned and uttered slowly, almost chantingly, the one word *soon*. Not till he was outside did she understand his meaning.

For a long while she sat without moving. A clock struck the hour. She rose then and went out quickly without any precautions against being seen.

She found the waiter before her at the appointed meeting place on the next landing. They met without a word, he motioned the way to her, and within

a few seconds they were sitting side by side in an empty salon.

It was clear that he had taken her coming for granted. She could see no special sign of excitement in him, and yet a hint of unexpressed friendliness in his manner flattered her more than the blind devotion she saw daily in the men about her.

In a few moments she knew that the man was her former tutor, Jevgeni Dolichin, and strangely there flashed through her mind his story of the girl Jessica, forgotten till this moment. Jevgeni was now a clean-shaven, serious-looking man and even that badge of servitude, his waiter's frock coat, could not rob him of dignity. He spoke very simply of his life since their parting so many years before. It was a story of political agitation, arrest, banishment to Turkestan, imprisonment, disillusionment and, finally, many years of toilsome drudgery in a foreign land. Now, however, he was on the point of returning to Russia under the amnesty granted by the new Czar. But he did not want to talk about himself. He knew her story in general outline; he spoke vivid, compassionate words of sympathy.

Olga thought she guessed what he wanted. No doubt he had heard through Golenishtsheff of her dealings with the revolutionaries. He was simply cross-examining her to find out how much she really knew of that convict's ridiculous schemes. Olga laughed to herself. The situation struck her as extraordinarily funny. She asked bluntly if he wanted

money, like that other fine rebel she had once bought.

Dolichin started violently and she felt pleased at having disturbed his self-complaisance for a moment. Yet he regained his poise almost at once. Abruptly changing his tone, he spoke as if he had not hitherto uttered a single word in confidence. A note of pity crept into his voice, and in each sentence she thought she heard more clearly a tone of half-mocking superiority, becoming more and more like that of a kindly teacher.

It was sad, he said, that she knew so little of life. He ought, of course, to have realized that it must be so. Otherwise, after all her terrible experiences, she could not have endured for a week the empty, vacant life she now adopted.

Olga drew herself up proudly. She longed to answer angrily and brutally, to silence him with a single scornful word. But that word refused to come. As he continued relentlessly to expose the vacancy of her existence she felt hard pressed. It was obvious that Jevgeni Dolichin had not forgotten his little pupil. He seemed to remember a hundred details of Olhovo days. He had set great hopes upon her, it appeared, and still awaited their fulfilment. Olga would have liked to meet the audacious impudence of these 'hopes' with withering scorn, but she was mute. She sat and listened, she did not know how long, to the man's admonitory tones. When at last she spoke it was of quite other matters than those

she had proposed to discuss at the beginning of their interview. She reminded him of all her sufferings, of the horrible disappointment of her marriage, of the ghastly slavery of her life till a few months ago. Did not all these things give her a claim to compensation, to indemnification, to enjoyment?

But he was ready at once with his answer. No one, he told her, had a right to such things just because his personal fate had been evil. Anger and disillusion quivered in his voice. Olga would not understand him. Her staring face repulsed him. She only knew that this had degenerated into a philosophical conversation, a sermon on all kinds of stupefying things, an absurd lecture about duty and the brotherhood of man. She did not know why this little tutor was making a last, frenzied attempt to find an honest, charitable heart within her.

A quarter of an hour earlier he had risen from his hard servant's bed filled with the thought that this marvellous apparition from his past was actually brushing by him again, was actually within his reach. Perhaps he might now legitimately worship her, perhaps he would not be obliged to return to the dark path of loneliness and bitter renunciation.

But now he stood before her with twitching nerves and hammering heart, knowing that all was in vain. He was enraged at his own weakness. He abruptly stopped speaking, telling himself that he had been preaching to the winds, of course. She could not be

expected to understand what he was driving at. That was a matter for the few initiates of Reality. He had been mistaken in believing in the transforming power of her experiences. He begged her pardon if he had expected too much of her. He still hoped, nevertheless, that she would someday learn to judge with freedom and insight, to see the reality behind the illusion of the petty laws of existence that had validity only for insignificant people.

Olga, too, had risen to her feet. Her heart swelled with rage. These, surely, were the very ideas she hugged close to herself night after night! And now this absurd little waiter, this terribly unapproachable tutor of hers, used them to strike her in the face! Why, she thought, with a faint flicker of her wonted arrogance, he was not even *paid* to lecture her now!

He ended on a note of apology as if he had wasted his time on someone unworthy. Olga stammered a few ineffective phrases. Things would happen, he would see—deeds spoke louder than words for the value of a life—a string of banalities of that sort. He listened, smiling indulgently. As he went towards the door he said very coolly that he might after all have occasion to accept her help some time. He thanked her for the offer of it. Oh, and by the way, she really ought to encourage her husband to take up some sport—riding, or swimming, or, better still, mountaineering. He needed bracing. By that time they had reached the landing again. He es-

corted her to the foot of the stairs and, with a curt bow, turned and went.

Olga slowly ascended the stairs, pausing at each step. Her head was spinning. She felt an urgent need for action. In her room she began slowly to undress, stopping from time to time to look herself meditatively up and down in the mirror. After all, nothing had happened. And, really, what the man had said had amounted to nothing. Yet—she had not been able to answer him! She could not find an evasion to deceive herself.

She was not yet in bed when she heard a gentle tap at the door. At her call a page entered and handed her a telegram. For a few seconds she turned it over in her hands, her mind a blank. Then she opened it.

"HER IMPERIAL HIGHNESS PRINCESS ANNA KYRILLOVNA IS DANGEROUSLY ILL AND URGENTLY REQUESTS HER DAUGHTER TO COME IMMEDIATELY. DR. DORIN, HOTEL BEAU RIVAGE, BIARRITZ."

Olga raised her chin and drew a deep breath. She was saved. Here was the event, here was her justification. Now, perhaps, began a new phase in her life. Jevgeni was wrong.

She shook off at once the doubts and perplexities of the last quarter of an hour. She briskly crossed the room and rang for her maid, then she sent to rouse Pupill. Her trunks were packed. Towards morning she went to Nolken's room. He was sleeping soundly and did not wake when she spoke to him.

She gave Pupill a few parting instructions, breakfasted hastily and travelled west by the early morning express.

Anna Kyrillovna's enfeebled body lay propped between large pillows, astonishingly like solid clouds. From time to time a nurse came into the room. Every two hours her two doctors paid a respectful visit. In an ante-room two Russian priests were at prayers. But Anna Kyrillovna, by her own wish, was for the most part alone.

Calmly, with a deep sense of contentment, she reviewed her life—sixty-two years of success and security. She was one who had never feared to probe her own heart to its depths, nor to weigh the underlying reasons of her own words and gestures. She felt no need now to be ashamed of any single moment in her life, since she had never deceived herself. Fearlessly she recalled days long past. The thin shy figure of Prince Boris, banished for years from her memory, now ventured forth from concealment, and without awkwardness or bitterness she could exchange a confidential, understanding look with the man she had so long despised.

At this great final reckoning her fame was enhanced in her own eyes. A host of busy, intriguing puppets, generals and excellencies flashed through her memory. Kubileff was among them, bowing his rebellious head submissively before his judge. Even the well-trimmed and brushed beard of her old friend

the Procurator approached in respectful attentiveness. Yesterday a long telegram had come from him, its grandiloquent, liturgical phrases looking oddly frozen and ineffective on the official form. Anna Kyrillovna smiled, picturing the sender's face as he racked his brains for a suitable text. In this hour she cherished no illusions as to the old fox's true character, but that did not in the least disturb her sense of real community in the faith she shared with the vain creature. Was she not just such another herself? To her great astonishment, now that her last hour had come, she felt firm in the faith. She was even able to speculate on this strange, unreasoning belief without endangering it. She laughed a little at herself and her own credulity. Then she grew more serious. Was it not customary in such moments to repent of something, to make amends, to think of one's sins? She sent her thoughts scurrying busily here and there, but she could think of no sins to repent of. That small affair with her daughter would be set right to-day. The Baroness was expected to arrive any moment.

Yes, the idea of sending for her had suddenly occurred to her the night before last. The mental image of this daughter, who had from the first been a stranger and an enemy, had staggered her a little. She felt it would be an act of cowardice unworthy of her to slip out of life without meeting her again eye to eye. Olga was perhaps the only instance in her life of a talent entrusted to her which she had not

increased and multiplied. The precepts of religion and the demands of her own proud heart were inclined to get a little confused in her judgment, but she came eventually to the conclusion that she ought to have gone energetically and thoroughly to work and made an end of the creature altogether, or she ought to have spared and won her for herself. Of Olga as an independent individuality she had no conception.

She sent a messenger in haste to the telegraph office. The Princess thanked God for giving her time for self-examination. Her thanks were warm and sincere, but all the time at the bottom of her heart she was rather proud of having kept her attitude of unbending hardness up to the last.

She had devised her fortune to two monasteries and the funds of the Pan-Slav movement. When Olga came she should learn at once that she would not inherit a single kopeck from her mother. How would she take the affront? The Princess doubted whether the crushed little creature, the childish undeveloped Olga she had been at such pains to preserve in her memory, would be greatly interested in such arrangements one way or the other. She waited impatiently for her daughter's visit to learn the answer.

Olga was tired by thirty hours' travelling. In her travelling dress and with heavily marked dark rings beneath her eyes, yet entirely self-possessed and de-

termined, she entered the sick-room alone. After nearly fifteen years of absence she looked at her mother with cold curiosity. Anna Kyrillovna slowly turned expectant eyes on her.

In a flash she recognized, with an almost clairvoyant certitude, that it was no small, helpless, silly Olga with whom she now had to do, but an extremely autocratic woman. How could she have so deceived herself!

She began to speak in a faint voice, feeling her way with halting, cautious phrases. She asked almost humbly for news of her daughter's recent life. Olga answered briefly and coldly. Every tone in her voice confirmed Anna Kyrillovna's first impression. The Princess fell silent. What was there to say?

The two women looked each other in the eyes, silently. The elder's glance grew softer and softer. With passionate longing she tried to get behind the impenetrable defences of those hard, frozen pupils. But her efforts were in vain. Every attempt at a nearer approach failed. After a few minutes of useless conflict Anna Kyrillovna closed her tired eyes. Then, slowly, she turned her back on her daughter.

Suddenly she felt herself lifted on a flood-tide of deep, unalloyed joy. God had been pleased to grant her the ultimate grace of finding in this strange woman a daughter indeed, a worthy counterpart of herself! She did not want to be spared. Olga's cruel coldness satisfied her very soul. Thus, and not otherwise, would she have acted herself. No mendi-

cant daughter had knelt whining by a mother's bedside; a proud, hard woman had come to spurn her now helpless tormentress in her last hour.

The revelation filled Anna Kyrillovna with such delight that she reopened her closed eyes. They brimmed now with sheer happiness; there was even the suspicion of a tear on her lashes. But Anna Kyrillovna had no fear now that Olga would misunderstand her. In a surprisingly strong voice she called for the nurse.

She insisted that the two doctors must be summoned at once. Before these witnesses she dictated in firm tones a fresh will, making her daughter Olga sole heir of all she possessed. The two priests who had been listening at the door in anticipation of the end, set up a loud wail. Anna Kyrillovna ordered them to be ejected. They went most unwillingly to the accompaniment of loud and passionate prayers that sounded very like angry curses. The Princess certainly caught that note. She looked at her daughter and broke suddenly into loud cheerful laughter. Olga's rigidity relaxed at last. Her sense of humor took fire from her mother's wild merriment. The two women laughed aloud in chorus. Slowly Olga regained her composure and stretched out her hand to her mother. But following her unexpected effort the Princess suddenly fell fast asleep. Her face still shone with the afterglow of happy laughter. She breathed deeply and evenly.

Hour after hour Olga sat at her mother's bed-

side. Late in the night the sick woman's regular breathing became fainter and at last ceased altogether. Princess Anna Kyrillovna died peacefully in her sleep a little before dawn.

When Olga got up on the following afternoon after some hours' sleep she found Pupill waiting for her in the hall. He approached her with marked solemnity and made her a deep bow. Two days ago, he said—in the morning—Baron Nolken did not wake. They had found two empty boxes of veronal tablets on the table beside his bed—and a letter for Her Imperial Highness.

Olga read the few lines contained in the letter.

"Perhaps you may be thinking, as you read this, that your life is at last beginning. Will you ever change? I do not know. And I cannot wait. Besides, you are thirty years old and still you know nothing, not the least little thing, about life. And yet I tell myself that you can never be really unhappy, even should things turn out very differently from what I wish for you, from the bottom of my heart, to the end of your days. Thy H. N."

Olga stood up. Once again she lifted her small, hard, pointed chin till her eyes rested on the ornamental plaster dado of the ceiling. Nolken was right. Her life began from this hour.

CHAPTER IX

THE CENTURY was drawing to an end. The old world wantoned in luxury and splendor. The classes of men with a share in the lordship of the earth had increased in number, but their triumph was quickly overtaken by satiety, by ennui, by secret fears for safety, and by doubts of the righteousness of super-abundance of possessions. Many saw in this dangerous prosperity signs of a threatened catastrophe which each passing year seemed to bring nearer. At Lloyds in London, where men could bet on the fate of nations as on race-horses, the odds against a great war in the near future, against anarchy in Russia, against social upheavals in America, Germany and Italy, were quoted lower and lower.

And yet, amidst the very general transports of self-satisfaction, these scruples, after all, only tickled the appetite for pleasure. For the present, at least, luxury, power and aggressive self-assertion filled the horizon. The shining network of railroads spread thicker and further over all lands. Across the plains crept huge canals. Day and night factory chimneys belched their flaming blasphemies to every quarter of heaven. New, defenceless lands were conquered, bartered, exploited, laid waste. Coal, iron, cotton

and oil were introduced into every realm and clime. A few small wars were fought, for practise' sake, on the outer edges of civilization, while in America and Europe population grew ever denser. Here and there an isolated painter, writer or musician claimed universality for his work, but actually the world had grown so huge as to be incalculable. And the real lords of the earth reckoned on that fact.

After the deaths of Anna Kyrillovna and Baron Nolken, Olga Borisovna controlled one of the greatest fortunes in Europe. She would inevitably have been a force in the world, even had she not so wished. But for long her thoughts had been dominated solely by an imperious will to power, and now fate had put in her hand the strongest, the most sinister, the most essential means of giving effect to even the least whim of her dangerous, detached brain.

At first, it is true, she lacked a proper appreciation of the value of the weapon she held. She had no knowledge of the complexities of the times, of the world of finance, and of incipient social change. She had rarely read a newspaper. But her ignorance of the links and stresses of the social mechanism saved her from the inertia of the bored, from the doubts of the wise, and from the fears of the tender-hearted. She seized upon the deadly weapons of international finance as light-heartedly as a child taking bricks from a play-box.

She passed the first six months of her widowhood in taking stock of her inheritance. The list of her title-deeds was almost endless. It began with twenty-three separate Russian estates, whose combined extent of over 950,000 *desyatina* was greater than that of many a sovereign state. This area comprised several towns, some hundred villages, navigation rights over rivers, fishing rights, turf-cutting rights, saw-mills by the dozen, several finds of gold, three copper mines and a platinum mine. It was impossible to form even an approximate estimate of the value of her forests in money. In addition she owned valuable sites in various fashionable European watering places. Olga's first financial advisers, small Russian-Jewish lawyers, estimated the total value of these possessions at some four million rubles; but it soon appeared that this was much below the mark.

Hitherto she had troubled as little about the meaning and significance of property as about God, or love. Now, however, this very concrete expression of power forced itself upon her attention. Her vast inheritance gave an outlet for her imagination. By way of ownership her vague dreams of boundless, ruthless despotism took new and living shape. She began to understand that in the age in which she lived this one of all forms of power in the world offered the best prospect of victory for the individual. Vigorously she set out to give scope to a will, frenzied, morbid, blind with impatience for action.

She began by cultivating the acquaintance of eminent financiers. Alluring tales of this fat Russian property had, of course, spread swiftly among the most redoubtable champions of the lists of capitalism, making their mouths water. They gathered from all quarters to the feast. Only the internecine rivalries of various hostile groups among them saved Olga from being completely plundered, no difficult task, at first, for an adroitly organized pool. Even as things were she suffered in the first two years losses which would have staggered any fortune based less broadly on real estate, and any industrial trust in the world. But her Russian lands formed an almost inexhaustible reserve. At times she might sell her shares badly at a third or even a tenth of their true value, but she could always cover her losses. To do so, however, she disposed of thousands of acres, chiefly forest-land, for which she would with difficulty have found a market if she had not made use of a method that had the simplicity of genius.

Since leaving Russia Olga had been out of favor at the Russian Court. The old Grand Duchess Maria made no secret of her disappointment in her former protégée, Prince Boris's daughter, who had taken to behaving so strangely. It was whispered at court, too, that Division 5, the police division that dealt with political cases, had found evidence of revolutionary activities pointing to, if not actually leading to, the Princess Olga. In the Czar's hearing the Procurator referred to her as Antichrist, not

without passing remembrance of her charming, Satanic shoulders. The chief of police who examined Golenishtsheff was subsequently dismissed with contumely. By degrees a section of the court resumed relations with the outlawed Vladimir, who began with delight to consider possibilities of revenge.

Public opinion on Olga was still divided when her large sales of land began to arouse strong feeling. In Pan-Slav circles it was feared that foreigners might purchase large tracts of Russian territory. As if to add point to these fears Olga let on a long lease to an English baron her house at Ligovo, close to the capital itself. Shortly afterwards personages in St. Petersburg society, whom she had heavily bribed, gave Olga to understand that an association of noblemen had been formed to buy up by degrees all the property of Russia's renegade, globe-trotting daughter in the national interest rather than allow it to fall into foreign hands.

At the head of this secret ring was Vladimir. He had a dim idea that in this way he might eventually ruin Olga. Actually he was assisting to form a syndicate to take up her enormous sales which otherwise could not have been made for lack of buyers. Olga kept careful watch on her former brother-in-law's activities. She took exquisite pleasure in dictating letters necessarily despatched from time to time in this business, and never forgot to add a few very sisterly and exceedingly perfidious lines in her own hand.

After initial losses a marked change came about in her financial fortunes. Her transactions began to be successful. Her credits mounted steadily at international banks. Her influence became predominant in various Belgian and American industrial concerns. Forests and copper mines, apparently idly thrown away, came to triumphant new birth in the form of Belgian mining-shares or Mexican oil-wells. For this she had largely to thank Mr. G. A. Colt, sixth or seventh in order of wealth amongst American millionaires.

He was a bachelor, sixty-two years of age, when Olga met him in London. He decided at once to devote a few months of his valuable time to developing and establishing a fortune so strangely founded. Perhaps he also had secret hopes that when he laid his booty of shares and dividends at Her Imperial Highness's feet (she had long since resumed that title) he might be able to persuade her to accept even warmer pledges. But closer acquaintance made him shudder at the thought of such a union. He was a sufficient judge of human character to guess that there was mortal danger here. What distressed him most, however, was Olga's total lack of feeling for money as such. She regarded it with a complete lack of reverence, as a mere means to some extravagant end, which to the business man seemed a ridiculous daydream. None the less he taught her some basic rules of the game. Olga learned from him to make speedy, confident, and hard decisions.

At the end of the appointed period, therefore, he parted from her, though on the best of terms. He had made about fifty million rubles for her. Moreover, he left with her his most confidential assistant as adviser. From that time Mr. Snowden travelled in her train, having intercourse with her briefly and exclusively on financial affairs. He took his meals alone, travelled in a separate compartment and often by a different route from his principal. Throughout their thirteen years' association he remained absolutely indifferent to her personally.

Mr. Snowden, however, was perhaps the only man of many who met Olga who could resist the allure of a figure so remarkable. Others fell victims either to her name, or to her wealth, or to her much-talked-of isolation, or to the magnetism of her cold, piercing glance, which never rested for more than an instant on the face of a chance beholder.

In her isolation Olga saw herself as a demiurge presiding over the agonizing birth-pangs of the new world that was to be. Her manœuvers and countermanœuvers shook the world's markets strangely. She made loans to some of the smaller states of Europe and America and at the same time financed rebellion against their governments. Simultaneously she put considerable sums at the disposal of two revolutionary organizations in Russia and sent the *Ochrana* information of outrages stimulated by her

own *agents provocateurs*. The peasants on her estates were harassed by overseers and driven to desperate revolutionary attempts by propagandists. She closed schools and paid the teachers who lost their jobs to work for revolution. The arrangements of all these enterprises were made chiefly through Pupill. His fears for his life, to which he attached extraordinary value, were sufficient to make him very zealous and careful, and the army of agents under his control worked so successfully that for fifteen years Olga was not publicly exposed, or in any way imperilled.

Her power was an inexhaustible source of delight to her. It is unlikely that she ever clearly visualized the full extent of her undertakings and their anarchical consequences. But if she had she would certainly not have gone back on them; for of capricious despotism she could never have enough. She was continually lured on by an unrealizable desire to abase the whole world to be the plaything of her cruel, malicious, despotic game. She was in the grip of a jealous love of Nothingness, an *amor vacui*.

As the years went by, however, her power became to her a commonplace. And this brought satiety. Great financiers and passionate wooers now left her alone. She believed in all seriousness that in the whole world there was left no resistance to her.

She was in the middle thirties. Her face kept its beauty—the golden skin was still very clear and

smooth—in almost terrifying perfection. The movements of her almost too slender limbs had a masculine precision. She dominated every room she entered even when she was not known. She saw homage of the same kind in the eyes of the statesmen and the flunkey.

What these submissive people were all dreaming of she had no idea. Very rarely some motion of a hand, some surprised or frightened glance, pleased and flattered her, but after a moment she would bethink herself that it was only a matter of so many thousands or millions of rubles to stamp out every remnant of free emotional impulse of that sort. Just as in the days of early childhood she found all around her inexpressibly boring.

One afternoon on the promenade at Baden-Baden Olga left her carriage to stroll up and down for a little. Pupill walked a few paces behind his mistress. She appeared to be looking attentively about her, but was really thinking with lazy enmity of a certain Princess Dushnov-Voljinski, a distant relative of Vladimir, who three days ago had taken a villa next to hers and had that morning stared brazenly at her through a pair of field-glasses.

A small ill-dressed man who had followed Olga for some moments suddenly doubled round Pupill and stepped quickly up to her. Lifting an absurd little hat, he introduced himself with the surprising

statement that he was a man who for long had had the honor and pleasure of observing her remarkable career. Olga's quick glance took note of a scanty tousled beard and an eyeglass precariously fixed. She turned away from him without a word, while he continued to address her with emphatic gestures and in tones of extreme devotion till Pupill, and a stroller on the promenade who now proved to be a detective, hauled him away.

Olga returned at once to her carriage. The odd little man was meanwhile receiving the usual 'caution.' She saw the distress on his undistinguished face and at that moment his eyeglass fell, and a very remarkable pair of eyes, gentle and startled, looked into hers. Hardly thinking what she did, she signalled for the man to be released. The horses started at a brisk trot and Olga, looking back, was amazed to see her odd new acquaintance running his hardest after the fast-disappearing carriage, still talking and gesticulating till lack of breath brought him to a standstill. Olga laughed a little over the incident and in five minutes had forgotten the man.

A few hours later, however, to her great astonishment she saw him again. He was walking up and down in the neighboring garden with Princess Dushnov-Voljinski's children, pausing at each turn to look with unconcealed eagerness at the windows of Olga's house. At sight of him an idea suddenly occurred to Olga. Pupill received peremptory instructions and that same evening the Dushnov-

Voljinski children's little tutor had entered Princess Olga Borisovna's service at five times the salary he had hitherto received. That, however, was only part of the little surprise Olga had planned that afternoon. Princess Dushnov-Voljinski's whole domestic staff, men-servants, cooks and maids, were lured away from her service on similar terms, and after a few days of extreme discomfort and impotent rage the Princess left the neighborhood.

Within a week Herr Edgar Taumer, Ph.D., seeing clearly that his new mistress had forgotten him, took steps to recall himself to her memory. In a well-composed letter he begged formally for an audience. Pupill presented this letter to his mistress with some misgivings. He was more than surprised when he found that the insignificant-looking little German was bidden to dinner that evening. Herr Taumer came in a suit of indeterminate cut. He was socially *gauche* but not in the least intimidated, greeted Olga with a deep old-fashioned bow, and at her invitation took his place without embarrassment. He then continued the remarks interrupted on the promenade. A remarkable talk ensued, lasting some three hours and destined to be of the utmost moment in the career of Dr. Taumer.

Six years earlier he had obtained his degree with a thesis on Max Stirner and Nietzsche. In the scheme of this apparently gentle and childlike being there was room for no other gods but these, and in that meek-looking little head with its covering of

scanty fair hair dreams of universal destruction seethed in a vast and deadly maelstrom. At times he could scarcely endure his own narrow existence, but he was supported and inspired by the example of the obscure school-master who had conceived the philosophy of "the Unique" and its properties.

He was not, however, a man who could find ultimate satisfaction in the abstract delights of thought and its formulation. He hoped to achieve certain very practical ends as the result of his thinking. In a series of pamphlets and articles in the anarchist press he defended the first rather confused theorems of his *Critic of Pure Power* so vigorously that he attracted the attention first of a few moral theologians and then of the police. At the age of seven-and-twenty he took this as corroboration of his theories, and he set to at once upon what was to be his master work, an apology for the cult of the Ego, which, strangely enough, was to bear the title *Transcendental Ethics*.

In this great work he began where Nietzsche left off, scoffed at the Superman as a feeble, bourgeois fancy, and, finally, allowed "the Unique" validity only as an incomplete precursor of his own perfect revelation. His thesis was discussed in certain anarchist circles, but he could find no one to publish his work. Meanwhile he was seriously straitened for money. He was forced to give up his philosophical labors for a time and to undertake private teaching and any other scholarly jobs that came his way.

Thus he became tutor in Princess Dushnov-Voljinski's family.

In her train he had visited all the fashionable cosmopolitan haunts of Europe. He moved in the great world without being of it, for he was treated like a mere servant. Close to the actualities of power, however, he took comfort from his position as observer. He acquired considerable knowledge of the characters and temperaments of a large number of rulers and statesmen. His busy brain sublimated, as it were, servants' gossip about highly placed persons, turning it into the material for his own ruthless, philosophical theorizings.

Chance attracted his notice to the Princess Olga Borisovna. The more he heard of her the more she seemed to him to embody the ideal being of his dreams—all ruthless, despotic, indomitable will. Perhaps it would be truer to say that it was through this woman's actual existence that his idea was first fully formulated. His excitement at finding himself living next door to one who seemed to unite in herself all the qualities of his ideal prototype is, therefore, not difficult to understand. In addition he had the amazing good fortune to be noticed by her and to be taken into her service.

From that moment Taumer was possessed by a foolish but very comprehensible idea—an idea characteristic of the powerless looker-on—he wanted to clothe this woman who *had* power wholly in the garment of his thought. He asked of reality an as-

tounding exact correspondence with his theory. With a nature like Olga's, hopes such as these were doomed to failure. But again Dr. Taumer was lucky. Olga was feeling bored. The little philosopher made her the centre of his system; that was flattery in an unusual form and for the time afforded a not unwished-for satisfaction.

She was as ignorant of intellectual delights as she was of sensual gratification or religious devotion. The juxtaposition of Taumer's world system with her own very simple and robust practical maxims seemed to her to lay bare the essential weakness and bloodlessness of the little doctor's doctrine of Power; yet she found a curious attraction in her nightly talks with the ridiculous eyeglass and straggly beard. He came to belong to her inner circle of acquaintance. He took up work again on his *magnum opus*. He revelled in the spectacle of Olga's absolute coldness and cruel majesty. His withered theories gained sap and life when made to serve the extravagant glorification of an actual, tangible subject. Olga was willing to let him read his work aloud to her. In a lazy way she enjoyed playing goddess to her quaint little priest. After a time however she began to find the form of service rather jejune. It lacked the smell of sacrifice that she felt to be her due. Lonely perfection began to seem a little chilling. As she began once again to search, more hungrily than ever now, for a worthy foe, Vladimir again crossed her line of vision.

Strangely enough her hatred for the man had of late years been either forgotten or transmuted. The evil he had done her was, after all, long past and he was living an impotent sort of life in the country. Olga had taken malicious pleasure in watching his feverish activities for the land-purchase cartel. She still reminded herself sometimes that one day she must take some signal and terrible revenge on the man. But the wish to do so had become a mere habit of thought with her very efficient brain; it was no longer the burning impulse of her whole nature. She continually postponed putting the threat into effect. Eventually she almost forgot him.

But Vladimir did not forget. In the quiet of the country at Bogoroditsk he saw with growing bitterness that his once bound, knouted and tortured slave was striding freely about the world. The prey he had so carelessly allowed to escape seemed more and more desirable. His thoughts circled obstinately about this one subject. He cut her pictures out of the newspapers like an enamored schoolboy. He was always nursing his desire for her, but this, instead of ruining him like Dmitri, strengthened and hardened him. It gave him infinite satisfaction to work against her at court in St. Petersburg, though he soon saw that he would have to employ new methods if he were to have any hope of success. He paid a small army of spies and informers but did not learn anything very definite against her. He could not know how well woven was the

net of her secret police system. All his attempts were caught in it, for most of his agents had long been in Olga's pay.

At last he made up his mind to approach her unexpectedly in person. He brought together as many half suspicions and vague rumors as he could find concerning Olga's connection with the enemies of social order, including some particularly hazy guesses based on his agents' incomplete reports. Together they seemed to him sufficient to frighten his enemy into some act that would betray her. Suddenly and without previous preparation he set out for the despised west of Europe.

He reached Ostend late one evening and was so unlucky as to meet her face to face on first entering the big hotel lounge. He tried to speak to her at once, but before he could do so the door of the lift shut upon her. The sudden sight of the woman gripped him like a fever. He had pictured this first meeting a hundred times, and now he could only stand dazed and helpless as an infatuated schoolboy. He ordered several bottles of champagne to be sent up to his room and drank glass after glass before recovering his power of decision. He was determined not to waste an hour. He called the maître d'hôtel, offered the astonished man half a dozen big bank notes, and demanded certain information. He then gave the man his instructions and, suddenly exhausted, fell fast asleep in a big armchair.

At half-past six next morning there was a knock at his door. Waking from alcoholic dreams with a sickening start, he muttered something unintelligible, and, opening his eyes, saw some stranger bowing to him repeatedly. It dawned on him by degrees that the maître d'hôtel was politely requesting him to approach the open window. He obeyed, growling.

Below, on the still unpeopled sands, a man and a woman sat near a breakwater. Suddenly everything came back to him. He took another big bank note from the drawer of the table by his bed and pressed the grateful recipient towards the door. He poured jug after jug of cold water over his iron-grey head. But it was not much use. He felt limp and weak and his hands shook. He could not have been in a more unfavorable condition for his interview with Olga, and only blind and angry obstinacy prevented him from throwing himself on his bed. No, by God, there should be no putting off! It would be to make too much of the creature! Without so much as changing his collar he strode wrathfully from the room.

Dr. Taumer was reading to Olga a passage from his *Transcendental Ethics,* which he had sketched out the previous night. His voice shook with excitement and gratitude, and from time to time he lifted his eyes from his involved manuscript to the clear, attentive face that bent towards him. As

always when the Princess was beside him, he felt that the most inaccessible peaks of his metaphysical system were irradiated with jubilant light, bringing him confidence in the rightness of his path, blessed confirmation, the utmost sense of assurance of which his simple nature, able to dispense with practical fulfilment, was capable.

Olga for her part basked pleasantly in the little philosopher's patent, yet unassuming, devotion. The details of what he said did not concern her; it was sufficient to feel that he faithfully followed the path revealed to him through her. His absolute faith, bound up with extraordinary affection, made her, in this fresh morning hour, feel almost tender towards him. And yet her disciple could feel, underlying that tenderness, a confident presentiment of his goddess's untrammelled superiority to such emotions, a sense of the sportive cruelty ever ready to victimize even the most faithful of her servants. For the present, however, he could bend his shiny flaxen head over his beloved manuscript without fear that she would strike.

A broad shadow fell across the rustling paper. Both looked up. Vladimir Boryshkin bowed slowly, while he tried with his unwinking gaze to hold Olga's eyes. Edgar Taumer scrambled to his feet, but Olga nodded to him reassuringly and introduced the two men. She expressed her surprise at seeing the Prince here. She had at once grasped the significance of the meeting and excitement made her voice

wooden. The even note on which she spoke, neither rising nor falling, would have intimidated a weaker man.

Vladimir, however, made a spirited attempt to capture the lead from the first. The gentleman accompanying her, he said, was no doubt one of those amiable and important revolutionary leaders whose society Olga had lately preferred to that of her old and, so to speak, privileged admirer. At this he took a step forward and tried to lay a confidential hand upon her arm. His touch brought Olga back to her usual poise instantly. She stood up defiantly, giving him glance for glance. Taumer, perfectly reassured, had sat down again on the sand. He listened with some little pleasure, as he was explained to the unknown stranger as an important philosopher, a celebrity so to speak.

The conversation, however, now took a turn which did not interest him. He ceased to listen and turned over the leaves of his manuscript. Thus an embittered conflict passed unnoticed over his unsuspecting head, filled as it was with dreams of wars of extermination, the miraculous manifestations of the Spirit of Destruction.

Olga looked at Vladimir and laughed coolly. Since when had he taken such interest in politics? And did he now consider the West worthy of his valuable presence? Vladimir spoke of his interest, his surely legitimate interest, in his dead brother's wife, feeling even as he spoke the absurdity of the

words in his mouth. Olga at once denied him any justification for troubling himself about her affairs. She was done with Russia. What did it matter to her if they were burning country houses there, as she had read yesterday evening in the stop-press news? Her money was in London banks and Pittsburgh iron-works. But as to Vladimir himself, would it not be better in these disturbed times for him to keep an eye on his peasants rather than travel abroad quite unnecessarily on his relations' affairs?

It was on the tip of his tongue to tell her to her face what he had been repeating over and over to himself for the last forty-eight hours, that she herself was an incendiary and a rebel, that he would see to it that she was excluded forever from her Russian possessions and banished contumeliously as a criminal. But she was still speaking. She said that within the last few days she had received honorary membership of the League of the Russian Peoples, after making a gift of a million towards the important and praiseworthy work of patriotic propaganda. And all the time the disdain and derision in her eyes would not be hid; he could not misunderstand it, gladly as he would have lied himself out of his false position. Every moment he grew less secure. He shut his eyes and bit his lips in pain, waiting for her next attack.

The distant, cutting voice asked what *he* was doing in these dangerous times? He wasn't a *fugitive,* surely? Perhaps even now his peasants and

his pretty little peasant maids were busy setting fire to his stout doors, his soft carpets and valuable Caucasian furniture? Someday, no doubt, they would burn *him,* or perhaps hang him. Well, did he not think it likely himself?

For a time Vladimir stared at his enemy without the faintest movement. If only he had never let himself in for this imbecile conversation! All was over, he felt. Now at last he knew what he had really wanted. He did not hate her as he ought. He was ready for reconciliation. Desire in him was stronger than the wish to destroy her.

Once more his angry, despairing eyes challenged her indifferent brown ones. Then he became suddenly weak and suppliant. Broken, he pleaded with those pitiless pupils. They seemed to drink in his humiliation and to repel him without mercy. A hundred wild suggestions flashed through his heated brain—to throw himself upon her that instant and roll her in the sand, to fall on his knees before her, to kiss her feet, to strike the fellow over there across those ridiculous eyeglasses, to spit into her mute, shut golden face, to yell, to weep, to confess all, to demand all, to pray. No good. No good. It was finished. Vladimir bowed very slowly to his conqueror and very curtly to her companion, who did not even notice him. It was strange—Vladimir felt no jealousy. And, indeed, there was no reason for it, he suddenly told himself, it was not a question of another man. It never would be. Damn the

woman's independence! Damn her, damn her! He spluttered the words over and over again as he stumbled back to the hotel.

He called for his bill at once and started for the station, forgetting even his suit-case. His cab had to pass along the front. It was then half-past eight, the first strollers were out and about, some gazing curiously at the Princess's celebrated blue bathing-tent. In front of the tent sat a thin, bespectacled person, and two arms, emerging from the canvas, touched his hands that grasped a sheet of paper, gleaming white in the sunlight.

At the sight Vladimir leapt out of the moving cab and ran madly towards the blue tent. But when his feet sank in the soft sand he slackened his pace and stopped. He shut his eyes. Then he spat with rage —spat at that accursed woman, his own indecision, at his wounded, desperate heart. Shame scorched him unendurably.

CHAPTER X

NORTH of Moscow the locomotive furnaces are fed with wood; they consume it with much crackling and sputtering and fling long grey-white smoke banners far and wide over the forests. In the south-west, black Ukrainian coal is their fodder. On the lower Volga, however, and in the Caucasus they are forced to drink *masut,* a thick iridescent by-product of the petroleum wells in Baku.

For there is no coal to be had there, still less wood. The well-to-do import wood to build their houses. It floats down the Volga in huge rafts. To the school-children of Saratov "wood" is an empty word. On bitter January nights wooden sleepers sometimes vanish mysteriously from railway tracks, for there are no twigs and fallen branches that the poor can gather for fuel.

In the province of Saratov political death sentences were carried out by shooting instead of by the gallows—perhaps for the sake of economy in wood.

Immediately after his return from Ostend, Prince Vladimir Boryshkin went down to visit his property in Tula. The first attempts at revolutionary risings

were just beginning in that district, but while elsewhere big country houses were already going up in flame and smoke, the peasants in the neighborhood of Bogoroditsk began modestly with deputations and petitions to the authorities.

A deputation appeared one day before the immensely long, one-storied manor-house, built in that style by Vladimir's father because all through his life he suffered from a fixed idea that one day his house would fall on him. Vladimir, however, was now obsessed by another pitiful, profitless idea, by a desperate longing to be revenged on that accursed face that had laughed at him by the blue sea, and had said to him plainly: Why should you interest me more than the revolution?

Vladimir heard a murmur of many voices and hurried out of the house. A hundred caps were doffed from a hundred heads. What did they want? No answer. On all sides mute, sheepish faces. Fools! If they did not know what they wanted, let them be off home!

A woman pressed her way through the ranks. She was the village school-mistress. Might she speak for all? Vladimir stalked up to her and saw a pale, gentle face with large steady eyes. Well, what did she want? Come! Out with it! She returned his look without flinching and was about to speak when he raised his hand and struck her in the face—not on either cheek, but, deliberately and intentionally, on the nose, so that she reeled backwards. A sigh

of horror went up on all sides. Then slowly the crowd began to close in on him. He drew his revolver, shot thrice and ran back through the house into the stables where he seized a horse. He shouted aloud with sudden joy at the thought of what was now bound to come.

In the capital of the district wild confusion reigned. Grave news had come from Tula. The Governor had taken refuge in the garrison. When Vladimir Boryshkin galloped into the barracks, the five officers there were inclined to hesitate; but half an hour later he was riding back at the head of the *sotnia*.

The peasantry were looting the manor when he arrived. Things looked black enough. Torn bedding and broken furniture lay scattered pell-mell, but no one had yet thought of setting fire to the house. When the cavalrymen came they ran. They were cut down by cruel sabre strokes. They were rounded up in herds. All night the survivors were forced to restore order in the house; the men to carpenter, the women to sew. In the morning Vladimir held a court-martial. The house was a hundred and twenty *arshina* long. At every tenth *arshin* stood a lamp-post and from every lamp-post a man's body dangled.

The soldiers lay in the stable-yard and, as the reward of their gallantry, were allowed to drink their fill. Meanwhile, Vladimir had the little schoolteacher brought before him, scoffed at her and

tickled her with the lash of his riding-whip. At last he let her go. No, not that way—through the back door, little woman! As he heard her terrible screams from the stable-yard he laughed aloud with delight.

For many weeks afterwards incendiary fires lit the heavens over the countryside for miles. But in Bogoroditsk all was quiet. The fugitive landlords had gradually assembled there and Vladimir's volunteer punitive corps was three hundred horsemen strong. No news came through from Tula or Moscow. Russia was already wrecked, perhaps. Well, what did he care for that?

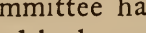
For a fortnight he patrolled the restive villages. The *starosta* he hanged out of hand. Looters were forced to eat charred wood and knouted till they bled. The women, particularly the school-teachers, were the perquisites of the *sotnia*. When the military arrived pacification was practically complete.

In those days of terror such vigor attracted notice. As soon as the telegraph wires were again in working order, Vladimir was called to St. Petersburg. Few railways were running, but in four days by a roundabout route he reached the capital and waited on the Minister of War. Two hours later he was appointed Military Governor of Saratov. The position carried absolute dictatorship over nearly a million and a half people.

To those who had previous knowledge of the Boryshkins the Czar's decision was a surprise. The

Prince had long been excluded from office. His brother had died under royal disfavor. Vladimir had not been seen in St. Petersburg Court society for years. But at that time of crisis the peace of death which was known to prevail in the Tula district was a recommendation for him that outweighed all else.

The same evening the Prince left for Saratov. On the journey he looked through a bundle of reports that had been handed to him at the Ministry. The late Governor of Saratov had been stabbed while playing blindman's buff at a tea-party; the local Revolutionary committee had officially recognised the 'execution,' and had condemned every successor in the office to death unless . . . Vladimir never got as far as the qualification. He fell asleep and did not look at the papers again.



It was a rainy evening when the Prince arrived at his new residence. The Marshal representing the local nobility, a man sixty-nine years of age, met him at the station despite the late hour. An elegant young adjutant also introduced himself. Vladimir drove straight to the Residency, where he found all dark and silent. He made a swift tour of the empty rooms and asked for information on many points. He took quick but superficial note of what he was told and for the first time showed live interest when documents relating to political prisoners were produced. He looked through these in silence for some

minutes. He then told his companions that he wished to mark his assumption of office by a firm and unmistakable gesture. Five of the prisoners, among them two women, must be executed next morning as a reply to the Revolutionaries' insolent threats, which were, of course, as well known to these gentlemen as to himself.

The startled officials advanced certain very respectful objections. Despite the late hour some half dozen dignitaries had found their way into the Residency, and now they all spoke at once, trying to convince the new chief that this unexpected measure would undoubtedly create a most unfavorable impression. The execution of two women, in particular, was strongly deprecated.

Vladimir took up the bundle of documents again, found the files relating to the women prisoners, and as he slowly read them through his scowl deepened. Suddenly he laughed. The case was absolutely plain. The two women, at any rate, should most certainly hang next morning. Early, too, seven o'clock at latest. The necessary orders must be given at once.

The old Marshal ventured to say that in his opinion *hanging* was out of the question. It was a mode of execution which had not been inflicted in the district from time immemorial. As a matter of fact the necessary apparatus did not exist anywhere in Saratov.

Boryshkin advanced on the speaker with lowered head. A few inches from the old man's face he

jerked up his own chin, and glared into his eyes with a look of mad rage. Who did he think he was, he shouted? What more had he got to say about the course of action proposed? As to a gallows, surely that could be constructed anywhere in the world in —he glanced up at the clock—eleven hours! It was a simple bit of carpentry. In the villages on *his* estates any peasant could have done the job! But he could see where the wind blew! There would be a change, though, soon! For the present he would dispense with these gentlemen's services. But he expected all to attend the execution. At seven o'clock, *precisely!*

He turned on his heel and left the room. The adjutant ran after him. No one else showed any inclination to follow.

In one of the many cold and lofty rooms of the official residence Vladimir threw off his cloak and coat without a glance at his companion. Then he turned and ordered him off to bed. He would have to be up early. The young man shuddered. The thought of seeing women hang sickened him and compelled him to express his horror, however it might smack of insubordination.

Vladimir sneered insultingly in the soft youngster's face. Why, it was just the women who *must* be hanged! No—let him sit down for a moment and listen. Vladimir paced up and down before his

hearer with giant strides. Rebellion in Russia would cease, once and for all, if only a few dozen female agitators were put down with a strong hand. Ever since the days of Elizabeth and Catherine, Russia had been obsessed by a cringing respect for petticoats. Holy Russia was now trembling from end to end like a frightened rabbit before these bitches—Perovska, Sassulich and Vera Figner. His Excellency's voice grew hoarser and angrier every moment, the dandified young officer's face became more and more bewildered. In the impotence of wrath and desire Vladimir shouted that all these court ladies and princesses were in the same plot—they all looked forward to the Revolution to establish their shameful dominance. Why, half these blue-blooded females waited with open arms to embrace the *canaille!* Every woman aristocrat was in league with the terrorists. But this was Saratov, not St. Petersburg! For his part he was done for ever with this damnable kow-towing to women. In ten hours' time these bitches should hang. Let him be off—to bed with him!

When the young man, scared and goggle-eyed, had bowed himself out Vladimir flung himself on a divan. But sleep would not come. Against the darkness shimmered Olga's frank, golden face like a flame, breath-taking, alluring, pitiless. He leapt up and groped round the wall till he found a bell-rope. But no one answered his ringing. He ran about, opening and banging doors and shouting for servants. After

a long time an aged and dirty little fellow came shuffling along the passage, begging a thousand pardons and explaining that the new Governor had not been expected to-day. The old man was sent to get hot water, a bath and towels. Vladimir stripped and made the servant bath and towel him, asking meanwhile what the town offered in the way of resorts, brothels, girls—what? Though the man could tell him of nothing but a couple of low-class drinking dives he decided to go out.

In a tumble-down pub frequented by fishmongers and porters, Lusha sang evening by evening as one of a troop of five, calling themselves a gipsy choir. Vladimir came in when she was singing the song about the little Kirghiz girl who was lost in the big city and run down by an *izvostshik*.

He saw dark locks, and a face shaped like a hazelnut against the painted blue-striped backcloth of the stage. Again a face of marble smoothness, near, yet unattainable; olive-tinted, imperious cheekbones—standing out against a blue shimmer of sea!

He sat down close to the footlights, quaffed beer and quantities of spirits, and stared at the singing, dancing girl. Gradually he slipped into alcoholic happiness. He gaped and leered and winked at her, still uncertain how to come by her. He was not sure how easy it was to get a little singer of this kind. It was, of course, simple enough in the Im-

perial theatres—if a gentleman asked for a girl there he got her right off! He had an idea that the men round him were beginning to snigger a bit. When at last the troupe came down from the stage and began to make their way out between the tables, he seized the girl by the wrist, pressed a ten ruble note into her astonished hand, and forced her to sit down beside him.

Lusha did not know what to make of this extraordinary stranger who drank and stared at her without speech. Later when their cab drew up before the Governor's residence, she tried to run away, thinking he must be crazy. But he pulled her through the door and along corridors to a lofty ornate bedchamber. There he undressed her, laid her on a great soft bed, and knelt beside her, still without speaking a single word.

At a quarter past six next morning, two companies were in the barrack yard in square formation. The Government officials were assembled to a man. In an adjoining guard-room where the two condemned women awaited the fatal moment priests prayed unceasingly.

A carriage clattered over the paving stones, swung past the rigid sentries, and drew up smartly a hundred *arshina* from the human wall formed by the troops. The man they had all awaited stumbled hurriedly out of it. There could be no doubt of

his condition. He floundered with exaggeratedly long and heavy strides over the cobble-stones under the eyes of the motionless assembly. It was not till the young adjutant plainly saw the newcomer's features in the uncertain morning light that, with a start, he remembered his duty. He hastened officiously forward and saluted, staring into a haggard, tired, scowling face.

The Governor looked right through him with a mouth grimly set, and passed on without acknowledging the salute to the spot, where stood the more important civil and military officials. Suddenly he began to snarl abuse at them—words mingling with animal ejaculations of rage. What had these gentlemen been thinking of? What was he to think of this scandalous negligence, this damnable secrecy business? He had looked in vain in front of the Residency in Nicholas Square for the public gallows he had ordered. Well, devil take them, he was not going to waste any more time over this business now. The next executions, however—at these words his hearers stared at one another in horror—the *next* executions would, of course, be carried out in a public place.

No one dared to move. Only the old Marshal, a Count and a member of a very great family, came forward, glittering in his over-ornate uniform, and halting in a respectful attitude, made a last attempt to tell the representative of the Czar's Most Excellent and Most Gracious Majesty that, in his opinion,

the order just given, and especially the execution now about to take place, was of highly questionable wisdom. He had only got out a few words, however, when he noticed that the Governor's carriage was moving forward again.

From one of its windows a woman leaned out, her face filled with eager curiosity, as she ordered the coachman to drive closer to view the impending spectacle. At this sight the old Count suddenly broke off, stood for a few moments in petrified incredulity and bowing curtly, turned on his heel and walked resolutely from the barrack square. A number of senior officials followed his example. Vladimir did not waste a glance upon them.

After that things happened quickly. The women were led out. One could be seen attempting to address the soldiers, but the officer in charge prevented her, looking round as he did so for the Governor's approval.

At the very last minute the unhappy victims realized they were to be led not before a firing party, but under a baulk of timber. Their protesting cries were stifled by sacks pulled over their heads. A moment later they swung in the foggy air.

While a long roll of drums reverberated and the soldiers stood motionless at attention, Boryshkin, walking up to the gallows, gazed long and greedily at the dangling bodies. Afterwards, some said they saw him smile.

At last he turned away, saluted curtly, and got

into his carriage, while for a moment the whole assembly, including the now restless and fidgety troops, plainly saw that there was a woman with him.

As a result of this incident, all leaders of society in the town, officials, prominent burghers, nobles and clergy alike, refused from the first to have anything to do with the new Governor. They might have put up with his interference in the daily life of their city, with his orders and prohibitions; but the coolness with which the Prince set out to flout the social conventions made understanding impossible.

Within a few days every man and woman in the town knew that the Governor was living with a chorus girl he had picked up in a *pivnaya* on the night of his arrival.

He replaced adjutants and heads of departments by petty clerks, who were glad to seize the unexpected chance of promotion. The police, finding their initial complaints disregarded—for at first their spies had tried to get rid of the hated dictator by secret reports to headquarters—speedily submitted to him. None the less they realized that the wanton cruelty of the new chief, who daily ornamented the fine new gallows in Nicholas Square with heavier and heavier burdens, meant trouble for them in the long run. These established office-holders, long intimidated by assassinations, strikes and sabotage, lived in constant dread of revolutionary retaliations.

The Marshal himself undertook to convey the complaints of all to the central authority of the Empire. To begin with, however, he was held up in Kozlov by a railway strike, which broke off all communication. Subsequently it was gathered from the very cautious and loyal statements in his letters, that at St. Petersburg in the present difficult times they had other things to do than to listen to gossip, however damaging, about a local Governor.

Meanwhile the deathly quiet soon prevailing over his district brought Vladimir into high favor with the government. Three short punitive expeditions up and down the river and into the interior of the province had achieved this. In Moscow barricades had gone up, and in St. Petersburg a Workers' Council functioned openly side by side with the regular government; no coal had been mined in the Donets basin for weeks. But on the lower Volga reigned the peace of death. Boryshkin had done his job.

Lusha was wise enough not to show herself often. Nevertheless everyone knew she lived in Government House. Vladimir could hardly bear to pass an hour without her.

It was not in his nature to inquire about her origins, or to wonder about her character and qualities. All that sort of thing could be dealt with when occasion arose. He still believed himself master of the situation and would archly whisper one or other

of his small repertoire of dull gallantries whenever he looked in on her in the midst of official duties, despatches, courts-martial, and so forth. Meanwhile she waited, her narrow eyes, set wide apart, questing after him like a dog's, asking what he really wanted of her. But it seemed he wanted nothing. He could not, apparently, even make up his mind on which of her eyes he should fix his gaze, and eventually it habitually settled on the somewhat wide, flat bridge of her nose where it joined her forehead—an uninspiring and inexpressive feature for a lover to dwell on. But he would stare at that spot till he could see the very pores of her skin, and then his own flushed darkly, for he knew she was thinking of those nights when he humbled himself before her, and said nothing. She had never yet asked any favor of him.

Occasionally he had a dim, uncertain sense that there was peril in having this creature near him. Later when the danger became plain, he had not force of mind even to think of separation.

One afternoon, riding back from an inspection, he dismounted in front of the six stone steps leading to the Residency. As he tossed the bridle to a groom, a young man came running towards him from the side of the house, drew a revolver and fired, the bullet passing through Vladimir's sleeve. In his excitement the boy lost his opportunity of a second,

effective shot and was instantly seized. Vladimir, providentially spared, hastily summoned a few officers and within an hour held a court martial at which the would-be assassin, who remained obstinately silent, was condemned to death. The execution was fixed for the same evening.

When the court rose Boryshkin went straight to Lusha. For the first time he found her door bolted against him. He could hear someone moving about inside, but neither questions, nor persuasions, nor threats could induce her to open. He was still at the door when a servant came to look for him, followed by an officer of the guard on an errand from the condemned man—a last request, the officer said, which he had not liked to refuse. He handed the Governor a small parcel. Vladimir tore it open and instantly recognised a little silver ring he had recently bought for Lusha at a country fair. He saw now, what he had not noticed before, that the parcel was addressed to Lusha.

He dismissed the officer and, throwing his full weight upon the door, burst it open. Within Lusha sat motionless and stared at him. Under her gaze his rage abated instantly. He entered her room hesitatingly, sat down beside her and showed her the ring, much as a child shows a strange unknown object to its mother and asks her to explain.

Lusha said nothing. Mingled shame and despair almost choked him. He implored her to tell him what she had had to do with this fellow. She had

had nothing to do with him, she said, but all the time her eyes laughed scornfully at the man's helplessness. At length, Vladimir turned away from her, silenced and looking inexpressibly foolish. He knew very well that the crucial moment had come. This was his last opportunity—he must break with her now or never.

But before he could force himself to a decision Lusha rose and faced him. She took the lead now. She had a favor to ask, and she asked it with quiet confidence. She wanted him to pardon the young assassin. The request almost shocked him into courage to fall upon and beat her—but she went on speaking, apparently without a trace of fear or embarrassment. She knew the young man well, she said, that was all. She did not want him to die.

The Prince was ensnared in the strong net of her glances. He would never, he felt, be able to escape. What was it the girl was saying? That if he would be merciful for once the revolutionaries would never attempt his life again!

God, what nonsense!

Yes, but he heard something more. Never again, never again would she leave him, but only upon that one same, unfulfillable condition! Ah, why should he not fulfill it? Surely the commands of this distant, unattainable goddess of the smooth brown skin must be obeyed. There was a long, tense silence. Then he got up, bowed to her, and crept with dragging footsteps from the room.

The adjutant was waiting to say that everything was ready for the execution. The Prince tried to tell him that there would be no execution, but the words stuck in his throat. He could not bring himself to countermand his own orders. He could not, would not, consummate his humiliation thus. Lusha was not there now—he might yet escape! He paced to and fro, his head down, like a caged wolf. Suddenly an idea shot up in his brain like a rocket in a night sky. It brought hope, sure hope. Why not leave Saratov at once, go away from everything without a word?—flee from place and power, and a woman? Go—anywhere—perhaps to Ostend. Shoot Olga and then shoot himself. Ah, but perhaps win her at last because of the very extremity of his anguish! First, however, he must get away from here—and that immediately! He turned upon the adjutant with a gesture which the other took for general assent. Then he called for his horse and rushed wildly to and fro till it was led round. He sprang to the saddle at a bound and spurred on, without looking back.

Two hours later the condemned lad was hanged.

Hour followed hour. Dusk fell, night drew on. The Governor did not return. At midnight Cossacks were called out and hundreds of horsemen scoured the district for miles. Telephone and telegraph wires hummed unceasingly.

They found him two days later, forty versts away across the steppes, lying unconscious and crumpled

in the grass. The horse lay dead beside him, and Vladimir's legs were broken. He was barely alive.

When the peasants heard who the injured man was they had to be flogged into giving help.

Vladimir came to himself after many days of fever, to find a graceful, brown-skinned woman, sitting beside his bed. A face bent to his with a subdued glow beneath its close-textured skin. He shut his eyes in the shock of utter helplessness. Then pain overwhelmed him. He felt his own body inert, unfamiliar, inimical. Lusha's first words made no real impression on him. Slowly and clearly she explained to him that one leg had been amputated and the other would be weak, childishly weak, for the rest of his life.

She hardly left him, day or night. The doctors were loud in their praise of this tireless nurse who took their orders with unmoved face and could be relied on absolutely to carry them out. The administration of medicines and pills was entrusted to her and night after night the sick man received at her hands the blessing of sleep. A little spoon floated before his tired eyes, a warm brown hand came close to his mouth, there was a bitter taste on his tongue. He tried vainly to read her face. Might she not poison him? But he was too weak to follow this desperate train of thought to its logical conclusion.

Many weeks passed and Vladimir made his first feeble attempts to walk on crutches. He never had intimate, living word or talk with Lusha. The line of her mouth had narrowed and hardened; nothing ever came from it but orders, admonitions, sharp commands.

One day the doctor brought in an old artisan who proceeded to take certain measurements. A carpenter, by His Excellency's leave—a *master* carpenter, if His Excellency would deign to know it. He had worked to His Excellency's satisfaction once before. It was he, if it pleased His Excellency, who had made the gallows that had worn so well. Only a little patience and His Excellency would see! A splendid little leg, thoroughly strong and reliable, well turned, too, and well born—ha-ha!—of the very best wood! He ventured to say that His Excellency would be completely satisfied!

A few days later he brought a long, whitish object, a tube, a shaft, turned in light-colored, varnished wood. Lusha helped to strap the stump into the padded sheath and bind the whole apparatus to the strengthless limb.

Up and down—to and fro. A fine leg, a strong wooden leg! You could bend it into an L—like a small gallows-tree!

One day when the doctor looked in he started back and fled with his hand before his eyes. Lusha was there, holding the Prince's wooden leg out towards him, laughing, tantalizing him with it as a chicken

is lured with grain, while he hopped round the room after her on his one feeble, trembling leg of flesh and bone, gasping for breath, imploring her helplessly to stop. They must, surely, both be a little mad!

Sometimes Vladimir would lie for hours, his hands twisted in her hair, staring before him with lost, stony eyes, and then life and time stood still. Yes, she had stayed with him. Her presence still dominated the last wretched remnant of his body. And he would never ask—she would never speak. He only asked that that brown skin would stay near him, that her hostile face would lighten his darkness, that he might gaze while he lived on the wide bridge between her eyes!

Prince Vladimir received his discharge and went to live in a small town on the shores of the Black Sea. A few years later his relatives in St. Petersburg succeeded in getting the family fortune sequestrated. The Prince by then had married Lusha and the pair lived on a meagre monthly allowance. The furniture of their small home consisted chiefly of dirty divans, old playing-cards and empty bottles.

Night after night the people on the floor beneath were kept awake by the stumping of their neighbor's wooden leg as he limped endlessly up and down, waiting for his wife to come home. One evening he followed her and met her in the street as she came away from her roulette party. She did not

scold him but she saw that sort of thing might become a nuisance, and ever after she took care to lock up the wooden leg in the larder each evening before she went out.

In 1917, in the first winter of the Revolution, Vladimir Boryshkin died of starvation. Later, Dennikin's forces occupied the town. There remained one cabaret where his despairing officers could meet to get drunk, to bawl songs or pick up a girl for the last time. To-morrow—to-night, maybe, they would have to fall back on the French ships. Everything was uncertain—meaningless. Everyone was rotten with self-pity. Tears and dirt mingled with blood from ill-tended wounds. In the foul air, heavy with fumes of alcohol, no one took much notice of a faded, elderly dancing-girl strutting and prancing on the narrow stage. She sang a particularly dirty song—there was a lot in it about the rich and jolly life she had lived once—and in her hands she brandished an old wooden leg.

CHAPTER XI

A YEAR after the Russian troubles, Taumer's work was published under the title of *Transcendental Ethics: A Justification of Absolute Evil.* The book evoked a certain amount of interest. Academic representatives of the philosophies of the schools, and even journalists who championed the existing nationalistic and capitalistic order, praised it, in a deliberately detached manner, as an unquestionably formidable intellectual structure, also attributing to it certain ideas which were their own rather than the author's. The socialist press, on the other hand, passed it over with a few cool remarks as a characteristic but quite unimportant outcome of decadence —a waste product of the mentality of a doomed *bourgeoisie.*

Among anarchists, however, of whatever shade of opinion, the book aroused furious hostility. In the ensuing storm of angry protest, Taumer found himself attacked by the very press for which he had formerly written. Collectivists or Individualists—they all branded him as a shameless renegade from the true faith, hired to sing the praises of constituted authority and going round hat in hand for the favors of the fat mammon of financial tyranny.

Taumer's connection with Olga was no secret. In political pamphlets, and even in ostensibly purely academic discussions of his work, he was ridiculed as the great female financier's yapping lap-dog. Jokes on the subject eventually crept into the middle-class comic papers and thus came to Olga's notice. She would have felt nothing more than passing amusement at the way in which everyone assumed the little rebel schoolmaster's enslavement to herself, if Taumer's own reaction to criticism had not been so surprising.

Literary success made him feel strong enough to stand alone, without, or even perhaps against, his patroness. The dangerous fumes of sudden fame had mounted to the little man's head. One day he slipped out of the Princess's house, leaving behind a silly letter in which he ingeniously argued the vast difference between the intransient power of thought, now within his grasp, and the merely transient power over money markets and over a band of venal spirits (of which he had hitherto contentedly enough formed one!) which was all Olga could claim. He next proceeded, with much blowing of trumpets, to give public notice of the break.

Fortunately for him Olga laughed indifferently at this behavior and soon forgot him. If she had taken his defection at all seriously nothing could have saved him from utter disaster.

As it was, his future career was an inglorious affair. He was so fatally infatuated with his sudden

celebrity that he was ready to sacrifice conviction and intellectual honesty to increase it. Moreover, in direct contradiction to his farewell letter to Olga, he had, during his two years of complete vassalage to her, acquired a taste for close association with actual power. It was not long before he attached himself to a highly placed Austrian official, who, in return for a moderate salary, bought his services for monarchy. He performed some curious evolutions during the next few years and the World War found him a prominent propagandist in the Hapsburg interest. He ended as editor of a homely German family newspaper with romantic and reactionary tendencies.

Olga rather missed the slight, tonic stimulus to her vanity which her little professor had afforded. She had changed considerably. She now wavered between inertia and furious activity. She would suddenly embark upon important, yet pointless, enterprises and then, after a little, cancel all her arrangements. She astonished Mr. Snowden by showing lack of decision in business crises. She went on sudden, hasty journeys. Pupill lived in constant fear of his mistress's incalculable whims.

She was indeed in the grip of a devastating restlessness which grew steadily. She slept lightly and was oppressed and harassed by evil dreams. For the first time she was troubled by loneliness; try as she would she could no longer draw pride or comfort from her isolation. It seemed to her now not

dignified but terrifying. At first she would not admit to herself the real reason for these changes. But there were hours when she longed for the relief of some little playful adventure, for a gossip, for the simple comfort of a friend.

She was clever enough to see that her longings were not of a kind to be easily repressed. But she was, in one sense, too inexperienced to avoid the exaggerated suggestions of self-mistrust. Formerly she had made her way with a somnambulist's security among the dangers which threaten the balance of everything that wakes and lives. Now she became a victim to useless brooding over herself.

She was forty years old. She had no vanity and therefore her still undiminished beauty did not enter into her calculations. She had always taken it for granted that her life was something set apart, something above and beyond the laws governing the submissive herd. She could do no more than dimly guess that many experiences, many joys, many molding and shaping pains, had passed her by. She had read of these things, she sometimes heard of them, she had once seen a reflection of them in Nolken's mild eyes that she now sometimes tried desperately to recall to memory. She suddenly began to see in ordinary faces about her traces of some great, some mysterious, some rich event that she did not understand. She tried to repress this fatal curiosity, extending even to such unimportant people as Pupill and her maid. She was so strong that she could

actually laugh at her own over-excited condition, but no self-mockery could quench the leaping fires of desire.

The critical moment had come, just before the beginning of old age, when her body rebelled against the too strict régime of her tyrannous mind. She was all at once possessed by a horrible fear that she was missing something that could never be recovered, that even now she might be too late. Her gestures grew brusque; her once tranquil eyes began restlessly to seek and to search.

For a little while she resisted, then gave way to the temptation inherent in the almost boundless material power at her disposal; even *this* thing, surely, might be bought? Here she disregarded her own better judgment; for was it not just this reliance on reason that had been, in large part, responsible for her present sufferings? She felt an inordinate desire to make up for lost time.

She had been neglecting herself. Her firm skin lost its fine glow. The doctors she now summoned frequently shook their heads but were helpless to cope with the suicidal hysteria of a woman, wielding such unfettered control over wealth and services. If Olga had been herself, she would have seen a kind of scornful pity in their eyes.

For a time the Princess's life had some strange associates. She lived for a time with Brückner, the

German anarchist. The man was a wealthy, eccentric dilettante, who killed time by writing muddled political pamphlets which he sent, together with very harmless little bombs (which were as yet unfilled) to America. When engaged in these activities he took every conceivable precaution against endangering himself; but as his grand philosophical system involved no risk, he trumpeted it brazenly to the world.

A little while ago Olga would have laughed heartily at such a man but now he just suited her mood. His windy phrases helped her for a time to persuade herself that her connection with him was a logical step in the unaltered plan of her life. In the event, however, he proved too stupid. The man failed to appreciate even the material advantages of his liaison with Olga, and he was foolish enough to try to instruct her when he should have amused her. After a few weeks he was unceremoniously dismissed. He left, uttering ridiculous threats of revenge which he did not, of course, dare to execute. But afterwards he went about boasting disgustingly of his liaison with the celebrated Princess till his successor in her favors, a Dutch secretary of state, gave him a sound horse-whipping, whereupon he vanished from the Princess's world.

One of her whims had been to institute a fund in aid of literature in Brussels. The honorary president of this foundation was the Belgian novelist,

Tobelle, a simple, honest, perhaps rather silly person. When he called upon Olga to offer formal thanks for her donation, she seemed to him the incarnation of the most exalted human virtues. Though she took little notice of him he was fascinated by her. He found a thousand reasons for remaining near her. When she completely ignored his ceremonious compliments, he was the more convinced of the inner treasures of her nature. She answered him with studied rudeness, and still he thought her amiable and kind. He wrote poems to her and began a novel in which, with almost morbid infatuation, he glorified her in the central figure. Sometimes, perhaps between a big financial coup and a trip to South America, she admitted him to a certain intimacy.

Baptiste Tobelle had long enjoyed celebrity among a large circle of pleasant, undistinguished readers. He now completely misjudged Olga's sudden tenderness. When she sat crouching over the piano like a beautiful beast of prey, she seemed to him gentle and adorable. He fell more and more helplessly in love with her. She insulted him in the presence of others, she mocked at his humility, she laughed at his pious poems, and she challenged him to prove to her that there was such a thing as a single good or loveable human being in the world. The poor wretch named *her* as an example and took all her malign remarks for jesting.

But gradually she worked him up to disown the

kindly commonplace optimism that was second nature to him, and to look at the world, to please her, as an amusing but dangerous mad-house. It cost him considerable effort, as may be guessed; but at last he saw even himself in the rôle of maddest of the mad. Then she wanted him to follow out the consequences of this admission and to give up his shocking, harmless, hypocritical way of life. A thousand taunts and hints poisoned his peace of mind. He became willing to believe himself a potential criminal if only he might keep her favor. Nay, more, he was ready to do any mad deed to prove his complete change of heart, to prove his courage, to prove the new superhuman morality which, if she had never actually required it of him, she had sedulously set before him as a model.

The result was that he was arrested while attempting to steal the famous diamond necklace of the Duchesse de Rovigo. At his trial he maintained stoical silence, nor did he ever mention the Princess's name when it was over. But in prison he went to pieces and was discharged on a medical certificate as a kleptomaniac. The whole affair might have been hushed up if certain reporters had not got hold of the sensational story. It proved a tremendous advertisement to his books. Publishers overwhelmed him with offers. But all this left him untouched, for Olga had turned him away from her doors, had left his letters unanswered, had gone abroad without

thought of him. A few weeks later the newspapers reported his suicide.

But he had not killed himself. Hastily procuring some ready cash, he went off to South Africa under the name of Haguenard. A few years later he came back to Europe and bought a small property in the Rhône Valley, where he lived as a peasant among peasants. Peace and mental stability gradually returned to him and in time the impulse to write also returned. He tried in vain to repress it. About six years after his disappearance he finished a little romance, a very simple, lucid tale of his new rural world. He thought it more compact and better than his earlier more ambitious and more exuberant work. He sent the manuscript under his new name to one after another of his former publishers, and one after another politely but firmly rejected it.

Just then he heard that one of these firms was issuing a hundredth edition of Baptiste Tobelle's most important book, and, giving way to his annoyance, he altered the title of his new story, signed it with his old name, and sent it forward again without any explanatory letter.

After a time he received a newspaper cutting, an amusing little paragraph on a recent literary curiosity, full of witticisms at the expense of the too cunning peasant on the Rhône, who had tried to creep into the great world of literature under a dead writer's name. Next day some peasants found neighbour Haguenard hanging from a beam. A

doctor eventually cleared up the mystery, and a week later the newspapers of the world rang with the sensation.

The story of Guido Prachel, son of the Viennese banker, was also a strange one. He had lived a life of pampered ease till one day, while he was still a youngster, his father caught him in some theft and turned him neck and crop out of doors. Afterwards as a croupier, a commercial traveller, a jeweller's assistant, a waiter, a guide to visiting foreigners, he hung on the fringe of the great world which, to him, was life. Parasites of Prachel's sort had begun to hear things of Olga which made them think of her as possible prey. One evening the young man met her in a hotel lift and made her an impudent proposal. She had momentarily nothing better in prospect and willingly bought the pale, girlishly good-looking youngster.

Afterwards she amused herself with a few experiments on the creature; for her old pleasure in playing with a helpless victim was once more stronger than the desire for warmth and sympathy. Young Prachel found himself surrounded by luxury he could not measure. He might have almost anything he wanted, upon the one condition of utter, cringing submission to his mistress. By abasing himself sufficiently he got a horse to ride, a villa of his own, keep for a little dancing girl, money in undreamt-of quantities to squander at casinos. But

every fresh present, small or great, had to be whined for, begged painfully, bit by bit. The business gradually developed into a set form of worship before the almighty goddess, accompanied by very palpable, corporeal acts of humility. Once he tried to put some of the things she had given him safely by and then abscond, but he was too well watched. That evening he was locked into a room in Olga's villa. His threats about the police made not the least impression on her. He was kept without food and drink, his ears were boxed, and at last he submitted again.

He did not know what else to do. After his former vagabond life the recent months of luxury and indulgence had weakened him. His body rebelled at the unwonted pampering and his nervous system was unequal to the excitements for which he had thirsted for years.

His pale, womanish face began to sicken Olga, yet she could not forgo the pleasure of seeing that thin, nervous body wriggling in terrified worship at her feet. At last, however, even she grew tired of the game; and Guido Prachel would have been dismissed with a small pension if he had not himself provided a more exciting finish.

Wherever she went Olga carried with her jewelry to the value of many millions in tall, steel safes. Prachel knew them well, for she had sometimes sent him with other servants to fetch out caskets to dazzle and amaze her guests. When he saw that a break

was imminent he crept one evening into the room where these safes were kept, and after hours of work, managed to break one open. He was just beginning to clear out the contents, when he heard the door open.

Paralyzed with terror, he saw the Princess come in and close it behind her. She had him covered with a small revolver and ordered him in an even tone of voice to put the things back. She then gave him a paper upon which to his astonishment Prachel saw that the whole contents of the safe were made over to him. Next, she made him take his fountain-pen and add at her dictation a confession of his own intent to steal. Questions and pleas were alike in vain. She ordered him to put the paper back in the safe with the jewels. He would have tossed it in quickly and perfunctorily; but she told him to be more careful with such a valuable evidence of possession. She had come very close to him by this time. As he thrust his arm deep into the safe he felt a terrible blow, saw the sharp edge of the heavy steel door snap voraciously, and lost consciousness. Half an hour later Olga's huge travelling car slid away into the night. Sitting in it, she calmly decided that this little adventure should bring the inglorious series of her lovers to a close.

In the morning a servant found Guido Prachel almost dead from loss of blood. Later, for a time, society in Monte Carlo and Deauville saw a very

pallid young man with no right arm fling fortunes away with the other at *chemin de fer*.

Olga's world had never been very bright or colorful. It was rather like a panorama with flat painted side-wings in poor perspective. Now, however, these side-wings seemed to represent a desert waste over which she roamed continually and aimlessly. And she had lost her old, childish pride in this empty wilderness. She demanded a reason for living now. She still asked herself unanswerable questions. There was no one from whom she could hope for an answer. She was an absolute ruler who had set her all upon ruling; she wanted success, she wanted events to justify her. But she could not force this issue.

She was too old and impatient to wait much longer. For years she had manipulated human beings like puppets, raising them up and casting them down, making adventurers out of business men, and rebels and men of enterprise out of nonentities. But when she had tried to command the warmer human relations she had failed shamefully. If she could she would now have compelled her subjects into the independence she missed in them. But they all became increasingly strange to her. She could not pretend to penetrate their motives and their actions. She felt she was lost in a world of strange, unknown beings. Intentionally, maliciously, without end or

ultimate purpose, as arbitrarily as God himself, she had entangled the simple relationships of the simple people who came in her path; and now this reacted against herself. Falling from her heaven of presumptuous pride, she found herself lost in a world of impenetrable mystery. Everything seemed unreal and full of difficulties. Her former simplicity now looked dangerous and useless. She wondered how she had ever managed to exist with her few simple, childish ideas. She was always hunting for some master-key, some saving solution of her problem, in books, in newspapers, amid the bustle of the theatre and the promenade, in bank managers' reports, even in the eyes of her servants. But she remained shut out from Life, with which she had too long played.

Having failed signally with individuals, she sought in vain for another outlet. Looking beyond the things within her immediate grasp, she began to form all sorts of extraordinary and wild schemes. For a time she seriously considered linking herself with some reigning monarch. She allowed a crazy idealist to lay before her *in extenso* his plans for founding a Utopia in Africa. She read voraciously but without selection or training so that she stumbled upon the strangest notions. At one time she thought of going to Yasnaya Polyana to ask advice of the aged Tolstoy, but eventually contented herself with appointing as her secretary a young Hindu who was in touch with the Count. This man afterwards de-

scribed her as a kind of weary, surfeited goddess Kali, a symbol of life choked by its own greedy lusts, an incarnation of the Western World, destroying itself by its own headstrong caprice. In fact, at this period of her life, she drifted into the dull, twilight existence of a capricious, ageing woman.

One day, as she was listlessly turning over the morning post, she came on a letter from Jevgeni Dolichin—a few lines in which he hotly reproached her for having lately neglected certain educational schemes she had formerly set on foot on her Russian estates. The fact was that she had completely lost interest in the business, as she had in everything. Now in her desperate search for a stimulating, spontaneous person, the few words seemed full of promising adventure. Disconnected pictures of childish days in Olhovo rose up in her memory, she lent a willing ear to the echo of long-forgotten words, words once spoken to her in a hotel in Munich. Her shrivelled, essentially unbelieving soul, was at that moment not far from superstitious faith in petty signs and wonders, and the note took on the importance of a mysterious omen.

She answered at once and very fully. Getting no answer, she wrote again, more urgently. She worked herself up over the affair, creating in herself a kind of spurious passion. She adopted a pathetic, child-like pose and begged for help and guidance. She had never really learned to express herself in writing so that her letters now were curious composi-

tions, full of breathless sincerity, muddled through very excess of feeling. At last she asked Jevgeni to come and see her. But it was many months before the meeting she had set her heart on took place. She realized that she was now the suppliant, and she made up her mind to be patient. She wanted to be a submissive learner. The child Olga need not be ashamed to wait for her teacher. Her starved emotions forced her weary, failing brain to renounce all idea of pride. She wanted to be cheered and comforted like a child.

But it was a profoundly changed Jevgeni who at last came to her, not the Jevgeni she had expected. Years of hardship, sufferings in Siberia, the privations of an exile's life, had burned the last traces of romanticism out of him. This time he promised himself nothing from a meeting with his former pupil. He had a mental image of her now as a hard, inflexible tyrant of the money markets. He looked at her when he came with complete mistrust, and observed with something like satisfaction that she, the Enemy, was growing old and withered. He too was dried up in every fibre of his being. He no longer possessed imagination, he could no longer give life to the pictures in memory's gallery, and he loathed the lined face that so imperfectly reminded him of them. Actually he was angry with himself for having come, and Olga was soon to feel that anger.

Once, long ago, Revolution itself had been to Jevgeni like a beautiful mistress, an entrancing crea-

ture of the senses whose embraces he ardently sought. But now, like this Princess, his ideal had aged. Jevgeni was now a fanatically dutiful official of the revolutionary régime. Life had changed him from an excitable, unstable terrorist, burning for self-sacrifice, into a cool and calculating director of his party's practical concerns—one of the first of the older revolutionaries to abandon the leaping flames of Bakunin's doctrine for the efficient electricity of Karl Marx's comprehensive and orderly system. He watched the growth of the movement with the calm satisfaction of a scientist, faithfully and tirelessly doing his daily portion of work to further it. The dreams, the confused enthusiastic thinking of his youth, he now despised.

Olga he thought of simply as a woman whom it would be impossible to change, a capitalist doomed with the rest, sooner or later, to destruction. As a person she no longer interested him in the least but he felt he ought, perhaps, to make sure whether there was not some good practical use still to be made of her. His first sight of the richly dressed lady in her great luxurious house convinced him that there was not; and at once he became simply the angry pedagogue, vain of his independence, revelling in his opportunity of provocatively repeating phrases he had uttered hundreds of times to sympathetic audiences in the very teeth of the enemy.

But had that thorough-going Marxian, Jevgeni Dolichin, looked a little deeper into his own heart,

now sealed and soldered by the rigid dogma of his creed, he might perhaps have stumbled upon some remarkable discoveries. He might have realized that his bitterness was really directed against his own dearest and most secret desires. He might suddenly have felt a wave of homesickness for the once adventurous little group of the *Naradnaya Volya,* for the ardent devotion to the idea of a life of sacrifice, and the erotic bravura, that could renounce the possession of princesses, yet at the same time dream that it had conquered them, because it was directed towards the most glorious of all mistresses, the daily renascent goddess of blood-bought Freedom. Now, however, he must not allow himself to enjoy even his own dearest convictions, still less to hanker to be loved, or to crave any other ecstatic emotion. He had burned these relics of unscientific mysticism out of himself with the acid of irony. He did not want even to remember that life in itself had once seemed to him desirable. He repulsed Olga with an assumption of cold superiority because she might have reminded him of it.

He saw her pleading, childlike demeanor as a piece of foolish caprice. He mocked her with words she had used to him in the past. She had thought of the revolutionaries as little paid commedians, had she not, to be bought and sold at will—like coal-shares—or pearls? Let her buy *now* if she could! But it would seem, surely, that Her Imperial Highness had not been invariably fortunate since their

last meeting, was it not so? It looked very much as if Olga were beginning to think about the world's problems, about the connections between one thing and another—and the possibility that a change was coming! But he denied now that she had the right to go into such questions. It was no good her trying to persuade herself that it was a matter of conscience! He knew the odd tricks played by boredom and satiety far too well! For such things there was only one radical cure. And it was a very simple one. Time and the Revolution would drive on and over her like wheels over a withered leaf. Might the leaf ask for reasons? Might it ever hope to feel the fresh sap run again through its dried veins?

Jevgeni lashed Olga with his contempt. He took bitter revenge for his own impoverished life upon the defenceless woman before him. He deluged her with facile, cruel abuse of the empty, doll-like women of a doomed society, who tried by displays of pretended emotion and by an assumption of simplicity to creep into the Noah's ark of Socialism. He would not give much for their prospects of success! Lazy usufructuaries of exploitation! They had feasted themselves sick on the torments of the oppressed, and the great wave that was coming would sweep them, helpless, away!

Olga sat motionless and let the stream of bitter words go over her. At first she tried to answer him, but soon sobs rose in her throat, choking her. Then, as Jevgeni's attack grew more and more wild

and blind, dignity and self-possession returned. He stopped at last, rose with the patronizing mien of a victor, and took informal leave.

For a long time afterwards Olga sat lost in thought. A turbulent flood of images raced through her brain. Gradually one emerged with increasing clarity from that chaos—a conviction, an incentive, an explanation and a decision. In her moment of absolute self-abandonment she had been repulsed. Her honorable expectations had been cruelly wounded. *But at last, at last, she had found her adversary!* She must fight. True, she had no cause to fight for, for she despised the world of money and exploitation more profoundly than this would-be destroyer who took such credit for his righteous wrath. For herself, she had no need of these things. She would as willingly as not open the sluice gates herself and let in the all-annihilating flood-water. However the world might change she would be the same.

And yet this heated little pedagogue had made the futile attempt to fit her into his own system of withered wish-fantasies! He had scoffed at her as a coarse, greedy *bourgeoise!* He had dared to deride her to her face. But he should rue the day! Olga drew herself up stiffly and proudly. She carried her head high, she filled her lungs with draughts of air, and with every breath she felt a surge of cold, splendid energy stream victorious through her reawakened being.

She lost no time in inaction. During the next few days she despatched enormous numbers of letters and telegrams to her agents, her business and bank managers. For a couple of days Mr. Snowden was in despair. Then he received summary orders to sell all foreign securities and concentrate all her resources in St. Petersburg banks. In vain he protested and hinted at the insecurity of Russian concerns as compared, say, with the Bank of England. Moreover, in his opinion, American steel bonds were a better investment than Russian forests, and he was surprised that Her Imperial Highness should suddenly have come to think differently. Thereupon, for the easing of his sensitive conscience, he accepted his dismissal.

A few weeks before her forty-seventh birthday, after sixteen years of exile, Olga returned to St. Petersburg and settled in her palace in the Millionnaya.

CHAPTER XII

Olga felt herself still young. She was full of hopes and plans, and she attacked her self-devised task with reawakened vigor. The old palace in the Millionnaya with its four-colored façade, close neighbor of the Imperial Palace itself, was to be the seat of her own ultimate and enduring *imperium*. Rooms that had witnessed her great-grandfather's balls and her mother's stately receptions were cleared of their furniture and trappings and turned into sober offices and counting-houses.

From this house broad lands on the Oka and the Volga were ruled. Orders for the development of mines, for the improvement of agriculture, for the erection of mills and warehouses, proceeded thence. Her private office, with its maps, files and statistics, looked like the headquarters of a general staff. It had its own private telephonic connections with stock-exchanges and banks. The work of organization devolved on Olga alone; she had no authoritative assistant. Her hitherto most trusted servants lost their importance. Even Pupill soon felt that he was nobody.

Olga determined to back up her undertakings if possible by direct political action. She was fully

aware that she was regarded with mistrust by court and government, but she judged that a few decisive acts would suffice to change their attitude. She again placed enormous sums to the credit of the Pan-Slav movement. She lost no opportunity to emphasize publicly her loyal intentions. Wholly indifferent as she was to the church, she often attended wearisome and long early morning services in St. Isaac's cathedral, because their Imperial Majesties were accustomed to be present.

For she had come home to fight hard for a party. She had looked the pitiless face of Revolution straight in the eyes; and now she gloried in the coming conflict and prepared to strengthen herself for it by all possible means. She had no love for the existing powers though she had been born among them and without them would have had to make her own way in life. But now it pleased her to ally herself with them. She was prepared, dispassionately, to claim the privileges of her birth. She was, however, to experience a great disappointment in the matter.

Strive as she might, she was met everywhere by inquisitive faces, by people who evaded her questions and failed to hear or to remember her requests. Despite broadcast invitations, despite voluminous letters in which she skilfully set the general, the *national,* aspect of her enterprises in the foreground, she did not get into touch with any really important figure in the government. She always had to deal with subordinates. Court society kept her at arm's

length. She saw plainly that nothing but striking success in the highest quarter of all would rehabilitate her.

A handsome donation to the Guards' veterans would, she thought, procure her a personal audience with the Czar. She applied for an audience directly she felt confident that it would be granted. But to her surprise her petition was rejected. Their Majesties deeply mistrusted this princess who, after disappearing for years, suddenly became active, obviously with intent to attract attention. A group of great landowners at court quickly realized that Olga's undertakings might upset their own peace. They invented the phrase "veiled revolution from above." The Czar and his nearest advisers were reminded by them of old police reports of Olga's connection with certain revolutionary groups—matters which had never been satisfactorily cleared up. The old Procurator to whom Olga was suspect, besides being an unseemly reminder of his own younger and more worldly days, advised the Emperor not to honor the woman by receiving her; she was certainly not untouched by the dangerous infections of the West and needed a long period of probation before Imperial favor could be unhesitatingly extended to her.

This repulse certainly surprised Olga, but it checked her only momentarily. She had offered terms of equal partnership. They had been rejected. Very good, then, she would go her way alone. It was the Imperial régime that was to be pitied, not

she. She had made up her mind to act politically, and it was all the same to her whether official government circles opened their doors to her or not. When she returned to Russia the word "reaction," so much disliked in the West, had had no terrors for her. She was a deliberate reactionary, she meant to retain her own power, and she was eager to prop the tottering structure of the State. French and German comic papers might mock at the Russian Empire for its impotence, but she would infuse some of her own energy into its tired veins. If the ruling caste would not work with her, if it were too cautious or too cowardly to trust an unexpected ally, she would take these too timid people's defence into her own hands.

She would have found no difficulty now in joining had she so chosen with the liberal elements in a society shaken by growing unrest. Her repulse by the Czar was known, and in liberal circles it was not forgotten that the exiled Princess had been the victim of a remarkable scandal, a signal instance of the out-of-date and tyrannous state of things prevailing under the old régime. But in vain these people tried to get into touch with Olga. The autocrat in her had nothing in common with the timid emotions and petty hopes of half-enlightened tradesmen and discontented nobles. When a certain well-known delegate to the Duma, a conceited and pedantic professor, came to tell her that he understood, that he sympathized, she snubbed him brutally and plainly. After that, well-meaning liberals, eager as they had

been to argue away and smooth out misunderstandings, were forced to conclude that she was not to be trusted.

Olga was once more thrown wholly back on herself. And she felt that it was better so. This somewhat withered lady with the small head, the resolute gestures, the faded coloring and the firm hands, conceived plans of Napoleonic scope. She saw herself, without an ally, between two embattled powers, ready at any moment for conflict. She felt that the end of an age was approaching and she meant to be forearmed. She thought out consequences without flinching, to the very end.

In preparing for this universal struggle she reckoned up all possible resources, financial, intellectual, military. She searched for models in the lives of the great makers of history, and in those of American multi-millionaires, but the records disappointed her. As her task was greater, it seemed to her that she needed new weapons to be used on a more gigantic scale than ever before. She took account of modern movements. She studied the strikes that took the place of old-time bomb outrages. She saw that she must build a capable state within an incapable one. As the administration was corrupt she set out to paralyze it, to undermine it, and at the same time to replace it. She came into frequent conflict with the organs of government, but she was always victorious. She established her own factories and work-

ers' settlements and stores; she built canals and barracks. For a time she actually subsidized government railway construction, until she discovered that her money vanished into the pockets of dishonest officials and costs had to be paid a second time by the State.

She organized, ruled, threatened and rewarded, gathered and distributed, tirelessly. She devoted hard study to questions of self-government, to agrarian problems, to the conditions of work in her factories. The result, it is true, was a somewhat confused compendium of everybody's theories in her mind, but her vast fortune enabled her to stand losses on a great many experiments. Besides, apparent success was often hers. Within eighteen months of her return to Russia, her new kingdom within a kingdom seemed slowly and steadily to be building itself up.

But battle with the Great Enemy—the heart and crux of her purpose—was joined from the very first. Olga looked that enemy unflinchingly in the eyes. She boldly descended into the arena against him. Her great estates were wide-spread over the land. She inspected them, as she inspected her industrial centres. Everywhere her keen brain found traces of the daily activities of a foe, like herself, seldom visible, tireless, and incorruptible. Concessions of homes and institutions and social ameliorations made no impression upon that enemy. On the contrary, he seemed to seize upon them as upon weak points in the mighty

fortified lines of money and business enterprise. That seemed to Olga to be convincing evidence of the changed character of the revolutionary forces—that character of cold, calculating enmity which she had met for the first time in Jevgeni Dolichin.

The Terrorists of former days had worked for minor concessions which when granted were often accepted gratefully. But now the struggle was carried on without magnanimity. Olga, who planned her various contributions to the commonweal purely as bulwarks of the old order and certainly not as gracious gifts, saw with exasperation that these were the first posts captured by the advance guard of sedition.

Her first experience of open mutiny was on one of her settlements in South Russia, where the inhabitants demanded to be allowed to amalgamate with a State industrial organization outside Olga's influence, and appealed to the provincial government. Its officials, who had been constantly harassed by the great lady's imperious demands, made her all the difficulties they could. It came to a collision between Olga's private police force and the official gendarmes. Afterwards she redoubled her efforts to create a small corps of absolutely reliable detectives and trained fighting men on each of her estates. She worked from morning to night. She travelled indefatigably. She believed that great conflicts were impending and that the time was short.

When war broke out it seemed that her expectations were to be fulfilled, and yet utterly discounted. The slack and drowsy forces of the State suddenly woke and took a firm grip of affairs.

Within a few days Olga had to alter her dispositions. After the first shock of surprise she made up her mind that the war was the beginning of a general break-up. She was right, but she underestimated the time it would take for matters to develop, and she overestimated her own strength. She intended to arrange matters so that when the critical moment came freedom of choice should remain with her. It was, therefore, of first importance to insure the stability of the central authority and of finance. She offered the government assistance on a gigantic scale, believing that at such a moment an offer of help would be accepted from whatever quarter. But to her surprise and horror her main resources were commandeered without more ado in the general mobilization, leaving her no right of disposal.

However, she fitted out numerous hospitals at her own expense. She offered land for the settlement of war workers. She personally visited the back of the Front in hospital trains, and worked in various subsidiary organizations. For she was determined not to lose touch with the masses, not to withdraw from what was really *her* battlefield. She threw herself into her own organizations and under cover of them cautiously resumed her private plans. Amidst the confusion and corruption of the commissariat ar-

rangements she was able to conceal her activities to a great extent. She set up libraries and talked to the soldiers about her own great industrial-agrarian realm, which was, according to her, to rise up in unheard-of prosperity and power after the War. She explained to the more watchful officials that all this was counter-revolutionary propaganda.

Actually such pictures of the future only irritated the war-weary soldiers and made them long to get back at the earliest possible moment to their land and their factories. And Olga could not help them to do that, whereas the propaganda of the revolutionaries seemed to bring their desires very close to fulfilment. All Olga's efforts, in fact, were valuable foundations for Bolshevik and Social-Revolutionary agents to build upon.

Meanwhile, changes took place in the structure of the State which Olga hoped to turn to her benefit. The great provincial and municipal societies that worked for self-government acquired concessions and a degree of independence, which they could not have carried through at the outbreak of war. Olga saw this as a sign of spreading decay. She tried to gain influence with the *zemstvos,* but the great political *amateuse* found she was not wanted by the petty political amateurs of the provinces.

She felt happier about her plans for forming the nucleus of a future army of her own from soldiers she had nursed and settled on her estates. Instances of friendliness in wounded men, and in peasants

saved by her from going to the Front, blinded her to the true measure of her influence with their class.

In the second year of the war, however, a stranger idea took shape in her restless brain. After the Russian army's appalling losses in Galicia and Poland there must be an immediate and enormous numerical preponderance of women in the country. When the Revolution came—it was now generally and openly reckoned with as inevitable—this unexpected change in the balance of sex would be significant. Olga remembered Jevgeni in his prophetic mantle. He had proclaimed to her face his scorn of erotic reactionaries. How secure he had been in his hard, calculating masculinity! But was it not possible that the Revolution might have quite another aspect? It might prove very feminine, very emotional and enthusiastic. Perhaps that great feminine majority would rebel against his masculine idea of a cold, mechanistic, legalistic state. That new, vast army of women might turn the scale. Olga began to make plans for enlisting these forces, of which nobody seemed to take account, on the side of her own huge and ever-growing schemes. But her thinking was confused. She had not a clear idea of the immediate practical ends she desired. The boundaries between fantasy and reality had become a little blurred.

Before she solved her difficulties the February Revolution broke out and gave her opportunity of seeing whether she had rightly appreciated them.

At the first glance it seemed as though her hopes

were a little nearer fulfilment. Liberty of the individual was triumphant. Personal influence, money, the gift of a persuasive tongue, and even to some slight degree the long-repressed forces of feminism, seemed to be victorious. Women held their heads higher in every meeting and openly showed their enthusiasm for the heroes of the day. All hearts were carried away by a sort of excitable, spring-tide emotion. Business men and officials wept lyric tears before highly colored visions of Freedom and "our dear Ally, France."

This womanish revolution shed little blood, but unfortunately it had little blood in its own veins. It was like an anæmic girl, morbidly excited over wounds, and still sentimentally pursuing the War. This bourgeois Republic decked herself in the garments of a woman of the world, lied like a lower-middle-class housewife, and changed lovers like a very courtezan. And indeed it looked for a time as if the majority of the nation, half-satisfied, would be content to drowse in her bed.

The more radical revolutionaries, however, quickly disturbed the nuptials. Jevgeni and his comrades had no use for empty promises and half-fulfilments. They strained every nerve to bring about complete and bloody revolution. In place of a wild game of chance (in which habitual winners and habitual losers had merely changed places somewhat lately) they were determined to set up the dull busi-

ness of universal happiness on a firm basis. They had no mind for the love-dreams of a bourgeois democracy. They were living already in the light of the sober morning after the orgy.

An insurrection in July was at first suppressed after bloody street-fighting. But strikes and revolts went on, and public disappointment with the new government continually increased.

Olga felt that her position was insecure. Yet she did not know what to do next. She had no adviser, no ally. No one, in fact, troubled about her at all. Had she missed the great moment, or was the crisis still to come? She did not know. Week after week went by and she did nothing. Her property was untouched, yet she felt her power diminishing day by day. Everything was slipping from her hands. Means of communication were frequently interrupted. Vast schemes, perpetually changing, shot through her brain, but she took no active steps to realize any of them. She could come to no decision. She waited and waited, hoping for something to guide her course. She listened with all her might, but the general uproar deafened her. She hardly heard the great explosion when it came.

One October day the streets of Petrograd suddenly filled with Red Guards. A morning soon came when Olga's servants and employees were driven from her palace and she herself was roughly ordered to make herself scarce. The Bolsheviks

were intrenching themselves on the roof; and as Olga, escorted by Pupill, slipped unnoticed from the dismal, empty house, machine-gun bullets began to rattle against the walls of the Winter Palace.

CHAPTER XIII

OLGA passed the next few months in a kind of lethargy. She was not molested. She had not belonged to court society and was not one of the hundred or so demigods, well known to every workman in Petrograd, who now died of hunger or by the bullets of firing parties, unless they had the luck and the skill to get across the frontier.

Olga might have been able to flee like others, but she could not bring herself to do so. She would rather fall a victim to this new, terrible, cold and bitter world, than live powerless on the charity of the old world that had once been her plaything.

At first she got on well enough. Pupill did all sorts of odd jobs and found her lodging in a narrow, dark little room, with a woman who worked in the box-office of a theatre. Leaning on his arm, she sometimes made her way through streets white with snow and littered with the bright torn fragments of many a glaring placard. Pupill was inexhaustible in finding new ways of getting the wherewithal for both to live. But one day he went out and did not return. He had been arrested as an enemy of the people, a speculator in rationed wares, and was shot a few hours later.

Olga now had no one to depend on but her old landlady. This woman disposed of the last of the Princess's jewels by secret barter, but she only got a loaf or two for them. Then she grew impatient and kept telling her lodger that she must look about for some way of helping herself.

Olga knew no one, but as she ransacked her memory a terrible idea crossed her mind. At first she repressed it, ashamed, but need forced it upon her again and again till at last she gave way to its promptings. For indeed she could see no help for it.

She determined to seek out Jevgeni. She had seen his name in announcements of meetings. He had a leading position in the new municipal government. To find out where he was was not difficult, but to get speech with him was all but impossible. At length, by dint of patient asking and waiting, she got through the ante-rooms and stood before the great man.

Her anticipations of this moment had been horrible, but sober reality was worse. She did not know what to say. Her humiliation was abject, but what other chance had she of life? Jevgeni was not alone in the room. He had a pile of papers in front of him and spoke hurriedly to Olga between two signatures. It was not till she whispered her name that he recognized her. The look he then turned upon her was infinitely cold and remote. He at once explained to his colleagues who she was. She was

dumb and he asked her impatiently what she wanted. She ought to be thankful to be left alone! *Her* troubles were no sort of atonement for the old order of things—and they would make no great stir in the new! He must, unfortunately, decline to occupy himself with any individual case of need, more especially in this instance, as he had known her personally. She was then led from the room.

The Red soldier who gripped her by the arm felt her suddenly relax and sag against him. He was a rough, sturdy working man from Putilov. He stuffed a piece of his own bread ration into the fainting woman's mouth and guided her down and out into the street.

After hours of unconsciousness Olga crawled back to the house where she lodged with Evdokia Genruchovna, the old cashier. The bread the soldier had given her was still between her teeth. She could scarcely wrench them apart. She felt as if she were paralyzed. She sat staring motionless in front of her. Now at last she felt in full the effect of her terrible downfall. She was not strong enough to stand this final shock of disillusionment and disappointment. Her clear brain was darkened, blind, full of fear. She looked at Evdokia, her eyes dim with tears, ready to implore her, to go on her knees to her, if only she would be merciful and not turn her out of her room. Her small mouth was dragged into a sharp, agonized line. . . .

The story of her sufferings is long and melancholy and not at all entertaining. She did not die. Some last remnant of strength in her still fought against the impulse to let herself go, to flicker out. Somewhere or other she had heard one of the catchwords of those pitiless days—*extirpation of the non-social elements*. And she refused to be extirpated. She clung tooth and nail to every chance of life. On revolutionary holidays she sold little buttonhole emblems to the proletarian youth. She painted flaunting postcards of gallant figures waving the red flag defiantly to heaven, and she sold these allegories of a marvellous future in store, trembling all the time for fear of arrest by the soldiers. She worked the curtain on the cabaret-stage of a little drinking den, and late at night when the show was over she scrubbed the wet and dirty floor. For months at a time her memory was a blank, she forgot the past and just lived, obsessed by a dull blind determination to do her work.

Evdokia was pleased with herself now for not having turned her lodger out of doors. She had done the humane thing—and she got her tiny rent regularly. In return she sometimes asked Olga to go with her to the theatre. But Olga always shrank with something like terror from this offer of a change in the barren routine of her days. She avoided contact with people. Perhaps she knew that she would not be able to bear up a day longer if the image of the greater world, now lost and de-

stroyed, in which she had once lived, were to become ever so little living to her.

When she got home from work she would sit motionless in her little hole of a room for hours together, doing nothing, thinking nothing. She never washed her hair. She grew pallid and slatternly.

One day, however, her eyes fell by chance on a theatre programme Evdokia Genruchovna had brought back with her. Upon it, in heavy type, stood a name. The letters ate their way into Olga's dull, half-shut eyes and danced a wild and mocking dance in her brain. The box-office woman was astonished to see her quiet lodger spring up with the gesture of an excited child and come towards her. What on earth could she want?

But she was yet more astonished to find that all the woman wanted was one of those theatre tickets she had so often offered her in vain.

Henrietta was fifteen years old, and had been for more than two years the little Princess's playfellow, when she returned to her parents' home, bringing with her a well-stocked wardrobe and the promise of a future dowry of several thousand rubles. But it was not only this *dot* that made the restored daughter of the house so exceedingly welcome. It was rather that in the eyes of court official, Ossip Lvovitch, his child had acquired a new and remarkable personality because for twenty-seven

months she had breathed the same air, learned the same lessons and eaten the same meals as an imperial princess. So signal a grace was surely sufficient to support one through a life-time!

In all seriousness Henrietta's father went through the roll of his acquaintance, wondering which of them were still worthy of intercourse with him; and her mother, who till now had been a retiring, unpretentious little woman, took to wearing towering millinery creations and was never tired of telling her daughter what a lucky girl she was to have been so privileged.

But the parents mingled certain very practical hopes with their gratitude for good fortune. As former companion to Her Imperial Highness, Henrietta, from the mere daughter of a small official, had become a desirable *partie*. The careful father began to look round for appropriate suitors. From this point of view, moreover, he realized that the strict seclusion in which they had brought the child up would soon have to be relaxed a little. She was taken to a few excessively dull social affairs at which the narrow circle of court officials imitated, and exaggerated, the conventions of the great world above them. Junior officials and young army officers with promising careers were invited to the house. Occasionally mother and daughter, dressed up to the nines, went to one or other of the Imperial theatres.

Henrietta lived habitually in a state of uncomplaining boredom and let her parents do what they

liked with her, but she showed intense enthusiasm for this one form of entertainment. She hoarded up her theatre programmes, read the plays she had seen, and constantly talked of them. It was some time before her parents discovered what was at the bottom of all this interest.

A day came at last when one of the young men who visited the house plucked up his courage and asked Henrietta's father for her hand. In the family talk that followed the girl's unseemly ambitions came to light. It seemed that she had long held views of her own as to her future. She, too, wanted to take advantage of the exalted patronage she could claim, but with a very different object from her parents'; she hoped one day to get taken on as a privileged pupil at one of the Imperial theatres.

Her parents were beside themselves with rage. To them it seemed nothing short of madness that their daughter should want to throw herself away among a crowd of worthless nobodies scrambling at the very foot of the social ladder, when she had actually had the good fortune to stand for a time close to one of its topmost rungs. It was not only madness but criminal madness. She was flatly forbidden ever to speak of the matter again and she was watched more closely than before.

Henrietta, however, was one of those people whose naturally somewhat feeble energies are developed and strengthened by opposition. What had been before a mere vague enthusiasm now became a

consuming passion. The more excitedly her parents behaved the more calmly she defied them. Being without friends or money or help of any kind, she made up her mind to apply to Olga's mother, the Princess Anna Kyrillovna; but she was injudicious enough to threaten her father with this scheme when next he began to worry her with talk of marriage.

Ossip Lvovitch very naturally made all speed to be beforehand with his daughter. He obtained an interview, literally fell in tears at Her Highness's feet, and implored her gracious aid for an afflicted and despairing father. In the midst of his abject whining, however, he found courage to venture a faint allusion to the fact that his daughter must have developed these insane and ungrateful propensities just at the time when she was companion to Her Imperial Highness, the Princess Olga. This mention of the daughter she hated and had just banished to Olhovo captured Anna Kyrillovna's interest, when otherwise she might have dismissed the whole Henrietta affair instantly from her mind. She transferred a little of her malice against Olga to her playfellow and condescended to pay some real attention to the father's plaints and to offer him advice. In fact, the infamous plan to which Henrietta soon afterwards fell victim, originated with her.

Ossip Lvovitch made up his mind. His choice fell upon a young army officer who was both proud and vain. He told him frankly about the promised

dowry and also mentioned, with paternal joviality, his daughter's quaint fancy for the stage. That was the way to catch the girl! Michael, Ossip's chosen lieutenant, must pretend to be an enthusiastic lover of the theatre and so gain Henrietta's confidence.

Everything went according to her father's wishes. The young man was a smart fellow, burning with desire to see his debts paid with the dowry the Princess had promised; and he played his rôle excellently. It was true that hitherto his "passion for the theatre" had been rather a passion for certain ladies of the ballet; but this had at least given him some knowledge of theatrical catchwords and he made good use of them. Henrietta was deceived. The pretended secrecy with which her wooer slipped plays and paragraphs about the stage into his letters to her won her heart entirely. It was not long before she agreed to Michael's proposal, which was that she should marry him for the sake of escaping from her parents' rule and then be free to live the life of her choice. Henrietta's father was kept informed of all the stages of the affair by his daughter's honest lover and sighed with relief when he found he could prepare for the wedding even sooner than he had expected.

A few days later Henrietta woke to the rude fact of her betrayal. Michael no longer needed pretence and he was certainly not going to give himself the trouble of pretending. When she asked him if he would go with her now to see one of the stage man-

agers, he flatly refused. She must indeed be a simpleton, he said, if she imagined that an officer's wife could appear on the stage! He treated the whole question as a mere trifle. When she stuck to her point he grew brutal. She would kindly not bother him with her insane ideas. He had other things to attend to.

These "other things" indeed soon became more than he could cope with. Henrietta's fortune was soon spent. It became clear that her young husband was a hopelessly bad lot, a gambler and a waster. Even Ossip Lvovitch was sorry now for his unfortunate intrigue, but all he could do was to warn his daughter with many fine-sounding phrases not to let a scandal get about.

Scandal there was, however, quickly enough. Michael was suddenly transferred to a distant provincial garrison. There married life between the pair virtually ceased. Henrietta, as the penniless and insignificant wife of a subaltern with a bad record, sank inevitably into the narrow gossiping life of the small Volhynian town. Even there she did not quite abandon her one enthusiasm. She found her only amusement in a few tenth-rate amateur theatricals got up by the ladies of the regiment. She took part in these with burning zeal, even though she always had to be content with tiny rôles as a maid or a comic village woman; for the major's wife and the captain's wife naturally took the parts of heroines and romantic lovers.

The years went by till at last a scandalous gaming affair brought Michael's army career to an inglorious close. The pair returned to St. Petersburg, where he made no attempt to get work. He slept half the day, stayed out at night, and grew morose and slovenly. Ossip Lvovitch refused to have anything to do with his daughter. His one pampered child was now a menace to his good name, and he kept her and her affairs as far out of sight as possible.

Henrietta had now in good earnest to earn her own living. Her pride revolted against the idea of taking any menial position. Now, perhaps, her youthful enthusiasm might prove her salvation. The first time she actually trod the stage, the goal of so many romantic dreams, her plan seemed almost a profanation. She had waited with infinite patience, she had humbled herself to beg over and over again for employment till at last she was engaged on a miserable nightly pittance as a kind of occasional understudy.

Never had the theatre had a more zealous employee. Day after day found Henrietta at her post by mid-day, waiting patiently in case her services should be wanted. She stood in the wings with shining eyes and watched famous players take the stage. But no one took any notice of her, for in the trials of the last few years she had begun to go grey and to lose her looks.

Years went by and still she fulfilled her small duties with unwearying punctuality. At last she was

given a permanent appointment. She grew older and older. Her husband died. She lived now in a miserable little room whose walls she plastered with programmes and photographs. She saved every penny she could manage from her tiny salary to add to her little library of famous plays.

Elderly and shrunken, in her shabby little bonnet, she still with her whole soul loved the stage, the deceptive glitter of the footlights, the never-fading hope of fame to come. Through all her misery and loneliness she had never ceased to believe in herself. She knew that really she was a great and celebrated actress, and even yet the day might come when she would be able to prove it. She went on studying great rôles. She kept up a friendship with Evdokia Genruchovna, the box-office woman, because she could sometimes get her to listen to something from her repertoire. The old woman would sit there and nod like a connoisseur; *she* had discovered long ago that talent and success were two quite disconnected things.

The new century began. The world was full of wars and sedition. The court and Czar vanished. Many perished of bullet wounds and many of hunger, but the theatres went on. Henrietta was almost an old woman. After the great Revolution she got a place on the committee of the theatre as its oldest member. She was always very modest and retiring and no one had any idea what extraordinary hopes the drab little woman still cherished.

The new revolutionary theatre had quite new and revolutionary ideas of theatrical representation. Plays that dealt in large masses of people in streets and on bridges had little place as a rule for an elderly professional understudy. One day, however, a celebrated young producer decided to stage a classical comedy in a new and startling fashion. It was to be a kind of parody, and to enhance the desired effect of hard and brilliant caricature he wanted a note of contrast. He looked about for some thoroughly old-fashioned middle-class type of woman to play the part of kindly but uncomprehending observer of the maelstrom of modern youth. But was there anyone left at the theatre who could sustain such a rôle? They had all caught the hectic restless manners of triumphant revolt. No one seemed capable of even *appearing* retiring and unassertive. The celebrated producer was at his wit's end.

Suddenly, in the half darkness of the wings, he saw a withered face with bright expectant eyes fixed upon him. Through the famous producer's brain flashed the fantastic idea that an elderly woman had probably never before been "discovered" as an actress. And he was a man who rather prided himself on his discoveries of talent. It was a very superficial train of reasoning—not serious, of course—still, he could think of no one else for the part and he decided he might as well try the experiment.

And the upshot was that Henrietta Ossipovna,

at sixty years of age, for the first time saw her name printed in big letters on the programme. She became the great exponent of Motherhood on the new Russian stage. She expressed all the love and tenderness she had never known in life, and her fame spread over the globe. Super-film scenarios were written for her and shown in every country in the world. She was invited to visit Berlin and New York.

But she was not in the least astonished. It struck her that she had always known this would happen.

Henrietta's influence got her one-time playfellow a job in the theatre's small library. There Olga did so well that she was soon promoted to the Central Municipal Library. When she asked where she would have to go to work she was given an address in a street whose name she had never heard. Yet she knew the street, for it was the old Millionnaya, now named after a famous terrorist of the old days. And the library had been established in the palace that had once been her own.

For a moment she shrank back, feeling she could not enter. Afterwards, however, she found herself less disturbed than she had expected. It was not, after all, an unfortunate chance. She soon got fond of the place where she worked, for it helped her to forget the awful years of privation and suffering since last she entered it. The new, small life seemed

to link itself securely with the old life of greatness and power. She could not have arranged it better herself.

At first she did her work mechanically, but gradually regular occupation in warm, light rooms thawed her frozen blood so that it began to run freely again. Mere instinctive toughness gave place to conscious courage, and at last she began to find actual satisfaction in working, in organizing, in planning her life.

In her leisure hours she began very slowly and patiently to gather the stones for a new palace of dreams and ambitions. At first, indeed, the structure looked very makeshift and rickety, but day by day she strengthened it. Hidden away in some corner of her soul was an indestructible remnant of self-confidence, and now it began to leaven and renew her whole being. She drew quiet satisfaction from the certainty that nothing now could threaten her independence. She had not been broken. She had endured all. She realized proudly that she had survived a thousand possibilities of shameful annihilation.

She was not much disturbed by the girls who worked with her, ruthless young people who laughed at the elderly person in the high-necked black dress. They nicknamed her "the Stick," and in their own way they liked her well enough. But Olga deliberately cut herself off from them. When her day's work was done she left the library with all speed.

In the evenings she usually went for long solitary walks about the town. In the streets, between the high, dark, cliff-like houses, there was a continual clamor of motor-horns; on the low parapets by the river sat lovers, close-embraced. In Olga all desire was stilled.

After a time she was moved to the big reading-room. It had been the ball-room of the palace. She had danced there at her wedding. Sitting at her desk by the entrance door, she amused herself sometimes by recalling old times; and she decided that just about where she sat she had met that amusing German baron whose name she had forgotten. Oddly enough that man had crossed her path again at another important crisis in her life. During her quiet hours on duty she tried to remember the details of all these things. She was not very successful. And often she laughed at herself. What a regular old woman she was, she thought, rummaging through her memory like a huge cupboard!

Baron Cortiselli, formerly Austrian Colonel of Reservists, worked in the library basement. He had come to Petrograd a few weeks earlier on his release from a War Prisoners' camp in Siberia. His experiences there had somewhat decivilized him, and besides he had no great desire to hurry back to Vienna in its present state of turmoil. He felt that he was just as well where he was. It was true it

was not easy to get anything decent to eat unless one stood well with the Austrian Soldiers' Council, and a town plastered with placards and full of democratic enthusiasm was not in itself very attractive to an ex-cavalry officer. But on the other hand he had got to know a very jolly girl, quite a dashing little thing who worked at the Public Library. He concentrated all his elderly powers of attraction upon her and escorted her home from work every day.

He was amused to find that he knew the library building well. It had been a palace before the Revolution. He remembered that he had come to a wedding there long ago as a young attaché, and he had actually made love to the bride over the telephone during the dancing!

In the basement the smell of cooking had given place to the dusty smell of books, but there was the telephone still, now used for ordering up books to the reading-room.

One day his girl told him someone was wanted at the library to deal with French and English books. Would he care to lend a hand? That was how he came to take this odd post. And having taken it, he stayed on week after week. What he heard of the new republic at home did not tempt him to return. Here at least he had his ration tickets and a small wage. And really, now that he had got used to it, he found the life amusing enough. Whenever he used the telephone and heard a feminine voice reply he would try to say the same sort of things he had

said on that wedding-day thirty-five years ago, but so far he had got no very warm responses.

As he became more at home in the place his gay little fellow-worker told him most of the gossip of the library. He heard a good deal about "the Stick" and one day he discovered who she was.

He went straight to the reading-room to find her. She was busy giving out a book and he was able to get a good look at her. She was changed indeed! Five-and-thirty years were unlikely to improve anyone's looks, and a life like hers was not the kind to keep a woman young. Suddenly he laughed to himself. A delightful idea had just popped into his head. Instead of speaking to her he turned and ran downstairs as fast as his gouty legs would carry him.

Olga sat and let her thoughts wander idly. She was well content. The level rays of the afternoon sun fell in long shafts across the black blouses of the reading workmen.

The telephone bell rang. She jumped a little and went to answer it. She heard an unknown voice whispering rapidly, "Isn't this wire a wonderful invention? It makes it possible to tell a woman you love her when she has been married to another man only two hours! You needn't even be afraid of shocking her. She can't see you!" A moment later, when she did not reply, the voice went on, "Well, what does Her Imperial Highness think about it?"

Leningrad. September, 1924. Outside on the Fontanka quay could be heard the steps of a soldier and a girl as they went by together humming a dance tune. Then an old man passed with a creaking barrow crying coals for the samovar in a long-drawn sing-song. The first thin mists of evening came creeping up the river and its color was that of watered milk.

A group of some ten persons sat at tea on the wide balcony of a large first-floor flat. Their host was a *ci-devant* art collector of renown. Even now he clung to the old happy order of private ownership so fondly that, merely for the illusion's sake of course, he was pleased to deal as a "Red merchant" in groceries and petrol. As a matter of fact it was a most profitable illusion and enabled him to make his house the centre of a good deal of pleasant hospitality.

To-day he had invited his friends to meet a distinguished guest. They had in their midst an English writer of repute, author of a number of historical lives of the sensational kind that treats biography as if it were romance and sacrifices scientific precision to the author's powers of imaginative intuition. This particular exponent of the school claimed that he could so completely feel himself into his subject that the thoughts and sayings he attributed to Napoleon or Goethe had indeed been as good as thought or said by these celebrities.

For the moment he was the official guest of the

Soviet Government and therefore felt himself three-quarters a communist. It was as a token of particular friendship for his present host that he had this afternoon condescended to visit people of his own class, who in this country really had nothing of interest to offer him. As it was, he attached himself markedly to a young German communist, who had somehow or other strayed into the circle.

The young man was not particularly pleased with the tactless remarks, which the celebrated guest insisted on forcing upon him in so hearty and comradely a manner. Political argument in a *bourgeois* household had no charms for him, as he came himself from a *bourgeois* family. Besides, the slender figure of a dark, remarkably beautiful woman, the wife of an engineer, who was one of the guests, interested him far more at the moment than sanctimonious platitudes about the righteousness of the Revolution.

Presently a gramophone record was put on, a three year old American dance tune that put the party more at its ease. The young German danced with the *inshenjorka*. Passing by in the dance, he saw the distinguished guest's eyes shining ironically. He was observing with obvious satisfaction the levelling effect of little amusements in the Land of Terror. The young communist longed to strike the eyeglasses from that complacent nose; he could almost see in the eyes behind them the phrases of an amusing series of articles on Leningrad, rising like bubbles in a glass of soda-water.

Suddenly someone stopped the gramophone. Two newcomers had stepped out on the balcony. Everyone without exception turned to stare at the pair. A slender, elderly gentleman escorted on his arm a lady almost as tall as he, wearing a long, plain black silk dress. The bow the man made to the assembled company was ceremonious and strangely old-fashioned, yet no one seemed to find it ludicrous. The old gentleman then stepped back and placed a chair for his companion, who at once became the natural centre of the small party. Yet it was not affection they showed her, but rather a kind of awe. Even the distinguished guest fell silent and gazed discreetly at the majestic old lady. He was presented to her by his host as if the honor were his.

She turned to him and began to talk freely about his books, most of which she had read. The others sat and listened. Soon an argument on the meaning of the course of history was in full swing. The historian maintained with heat and with some conceit that all human history had for its object the setting forth of a single principle, the so-called Good, by which was to be understood the highest sum of human possibilities. His opponent laughed a little as if in mockery, turned to her husband with a really charming smile, and received from him an encouraging nod. She then asked the distinguished guest, somewhat in the naïve manner of an obstinate and unbelieving child, whether his work had really given him many opportunities of studying the working of

this great, but surely rather stupid, principle of Good. The writer plunged into proofs and dialectic formularies, ostentatiously parading names and quotations. But the old lady kept getting him into difficulties with her little sceptical questions till the ornamental stucco façade of his ideas began to look badly damaged. Silenced at last and very much out of humor, he looked angrily and pompously about him.

No one came to his aid, not even the young communist who had forgotten his existence. The young man sat and listened while the old lady gave, quite simply and quite ruthlessly, her views on the utter meaninglessness of the Universe. When one had lived one's life one came to realize that all things were moved by one and the same irresistible force—call it good or bad, revolutionary or reactionary, it did not matter—a force making for destruction, for the break-down of the atom, a striving towards Nothingness, to the Abyss.

The young German found himself contradicting her without quite knowing what he meant to say. He argued that the Revolution had been an outlet for just this yearning after Nothingness, in truth, a barrier and a dam against the *bourgeois* world that was sliding recklessly towards the Abyss.

The old lady turned to him with a cheerful smile. So the Revolution meant renunciation, did it? She feared his interpretation would find little understanding amongst the leaders of his party. Probably he himself knew what it meant to think too much, too

painfully, too disruptively. At heart he was ashamed of being an intellectual. Was it not so?

There was momentary silence. Then the young man and the old woman looked each other full in the face. And the young man bowed his head.

Soon after that the two old people rose to go. Everyone at once stood up and took leave of them in the almost ceremonial fashion with which they had greeted them. When they were gone the distinguished guest suddenly became very animated. He was most curious to know the lady's name. He had failed to catch it at the moment of introduction. The host then told him with a certain pride all that he knew of the life of the *ci-devant* Princess Olga Borisovna.

The distinguished guest plainly expressed his displeasure. He made a number of general observations about half-instructed lay-folk who pretend to form judgments on history. And he could not forbear a mild reproach to his young *comrade* for the very unimpressive way in which he had surrendered on the question of his ideals.

He got no answer. The young man sat lost in thought. It seemed to him that he had received a tremendous revelation. Years ago he had fled for refuge to the protecting arms of a dogmatic and exclusive creed. And yet one could live *in vacuo; that* he had seen with his own eyes this day. For the first time in his life he doubted the sense of revolt. If such a personality as this woman's could

exist, he must question whether all his most cherished convictions were not mere self-deception. He felt ashamed of the paltry fear that made him crave for reassurance, for sanctions.

Several years later, when he no longer adhered to any group or organization, he did his best to hunt up the facts recorded in this biography. Everywhere he found traces of the working of that same blind irrational Force, first disclosed to him on the balcony over the Fontanka. Everywhere existence negatived itself. Everywhere men still hesitated fearlessly to acknowledge the Great Void. They did not yet know themselves well enough to forsake the refuge of hope, the illusion of mutual responsibility. But he felt that these things would not much longer endure. True, the man was still young and thoroughly prepared to embrace the icy coldness of the stars and view mankind through an astronomer's telescope.

THE END